THE WORLD'S EPOCH-MAKERS.
EDITED BY OLIPHANT SMEATON.

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# Savonarola

By
GEORGE M'HARDY, D.D.

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OLIPHANT SMEATON

# Savonarola

By Rev. George M'Hardy, D.D.

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THE WORLD'S EPOCH-MAKERS

# Savonarola

By

Rev. George M'Hardy, D.D.

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# PREFACE

ONE of the Popes—Pius VII.—is reported to have said that when he got to heaven he should begin by asking whether Savonarola was a saint or a schismatic, a prophet or a charlatan. That was long a keenly debated question, and for generations the controversies waged over it had an absorbing attraction for many minds. Those controversies have in large measure subsided, yet the life-story out of which they sprang possesses a singular fascination still, owing partly to its dramatic surprises and the picturesque impressiveness of its outstanding incidents, and partly also to the momentous character of the movements and changes that marked the period to which it belongs.

In this volume an attempt is made to describe the figure which the great Dominican presented in his day and the work he strove to accomplish, as well as to indicate the place in history which may reasonably be claimed for him; and in performing this task my endeavour has been to introduce such touches of local colouring as may aid the reader in realising the scenes depicted.

For the facts of Savonarola's career I have drawn chiefly from the following sources:—Villari's *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, Madden's *Life and*

*Martyrdom of Girolamo Savonarola*, Clark's *Savonarola, his Life and Times*, Dr. Creighton's *History of the Papacy*, Harford's *Life of Michael Angelo Buonarotti, with Memoirs of Savonarola, Raphael, and Vittoria Colonna*, Mrs. Oliphant's *Makers of Florence*, Milman's *Savonarola, Erasmus, and Other Essays*, Frederick Myers' *Lectures on Great Men*, George Eliot's *Romola*, and a brilliant sketch in R. A. Vaughan's *Essays and Remains*. Professor Villari's work, which stands first in this list, contains a full and exceedingly valuable store of information, skilfully arranged and used with admirable effect; and it would be impossible to write on Savonarola without being laid under large obligations to that book. I must acknowledge my indebtedness to it, particularly for many of the quotations from speeches and sermons which are given in the course of the narrative.

I have also been indebted to two writers who have treated the subject from the distinctively Roman Catholic point of view. One is Dr. Pastor, of the University of Innsbruck, who, in his *History of the Popes*, presents a lifelike record of the Florentine friar and of the circumstances of the times in which he moved. The other is Father Lucas, whose *Fra Girolamo Savonarola* brings together a rich collection of contemporary documentary evidence bearing on the relations of parties, the political and ecclesiastical intrigues, and the correspondence between the magistracy of Florence and the Papal Court at Rome. Both these writers, while displaying a frank appreciation of the sincerity of Savonarola's intentions and the good service he rendered to morality and religion, yet condemn him severely for the stand he took in opposition to the demands of the

Holy See; and in order to avoid exaggeration or one-sidedness of statement on this and similar points, I have sought to weigh as carefully as possible the arguments they advance.

With regard to the various characters and events, and the aspects of society and religion, which come into view in dealing with the main subject, other works of reference have been consulted, such as Gregorovius' *History of Rome in the Middle Ages*, Hallam's *State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo de Medici*, E. G. Gardner's *Story of Florence*, besides articles in the leading Biographical Dictionaries and Encyclopædias.

If this book can help to deepen interest in a memorable and eventful historic drama, and in the extraordinary man who played in it so striking and, towards the close, so pathetic a part, it will have served the purpose for which it was written.

GEORGE M'HARDY.

KIRKCALDY, *March* 1901.

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# SAVONAROLA

## CHAPTER I

### The Age and the Man

The fifteenth century is remarkable as the period in which we can watch the spectacle of the modern world struggling into birth. Some of the forces which had been working through the long course of the Middle Ages were becoming exhausted; some were producing their inevitable reactions; some were expanding in power, bursting their old limits, and assuming more advanced forms; new forces altogether were coming into play. The intellectual, political, moral, and religious life of Europe was manifestly preparing for a fresh stage of development. The feudal system was breaking up, and great changes were transpiring in the organisation of states and nations. Commerce was striking out into new fields, and the commercial classes were rising to prominence in society. Art was springing into unwonted activity, and in painting, sculpture, and architecture exhibiting amazing richness and beauty in its creations. On every side thought was stirring; the range of interests was widening; there

was a growing devotion to literature, and the invention of printing came just in time to multiply the books that were wanted and to meet the craving for knowledge which had been awakened. The human mind was in a ferment of unrest, throwing off the bondage of old customs and traditional ideas, and vaguely straining after larger and freer scope for its native instincts and energies. In short, a movement was in progress destined to affect the whole future history of the Western world.

That movement, so familiarly known as the Renaissance, had been going on for several generations, but by the middle of the fifteenth century it had become a potent and pervasive influence. Its centre was in the great cities of Italy. There, for many years past, a revived passion for learning had arisen, and princes and nobles vied with each other in their patronage of intellectual and artistic genius. Greek scholars had visited Italy, bringing with them the manuscripts of their own ancient classics, and they had been warmly welcomed at the universities and the courts of the great. Italian students and students from other lands gathered round them, eager to share the culture to be derived from the literary treasures which they possessed. The number of those disseminators of ancient Grecian lore was immensely increased when, in 1453, the capture of Constantinople by the Turks drove many of the learned men of that city to seek refuge in the land which was so ready to receive them as teachers. The result was a marvellous quickening of intellectual activity. Men broke away from the narrow and formal subtleties of the scholastic philosophy, and from the hard dogmatism of the scholastic

theology, which, enforced by the august authority of the Roman Catholic Church, had for ages reigned supreme. It became the fashion in all sections of society, from the highest to the lowest, to be scholars and students of the New Learning. The freer ideas, the fresher and more natural views of life, drawn from the literature of pagan Greece, exerted an irresistible charm. A new philosophy of life began to be advocated and acted upon. Hitherto, through the overwhelming dominance of the Church, speculation and learning had dealt with questions mainly of mystical and theological interest; and the shadow of the supernatural and the unseen hovered over men in all their thinking and conduct. Now liberty was claimed on behalf of the natural enjoyments of man, and on behalf of the free exercise of all man's natural faculties and energies. This was what has been designated the Humanist factor in the Renaissance. It was a protest against the spirit of the centuries that had been lived through, and the beginning of a new attitude towards the world and the secular side of life generally, and an insistence on a new conception of man's place and range of action amid the world's interests and affairs. The ancient classics were held up as the *literae humaniores*, the literature which nourished the fulness of man's being, and helped man to realise the variety of his own powers and the manifold attractions and uses of the things around him.

Necessarily, the tendency of such a movement was rationalistic and sceptical. It generated a critical and inquiring temper, a disposition to question the grounds of established laws, traditions, and beliefs. But it led

to no active crusade, no strenuous struggle to rectify the errors and evils of the world. The Humanists were not heroic reformers. They were content with the mental emancipation which their studies gave them. They revelled in their freedom of thought and in the unfettered exercise of their individual powers. They pursued their learned researches, compared texts and codices, wrote commentaries on their favourite authors, translated Greek books into Latin, composed verses and dissertations after the manner of the classic poet or historian they most admired—for the writers of the Renaissance were mainly imitators and copyists, and exhibited little originality either in thought or style. But amid all their scholarly industry they sought only their own culture, and recognised no mission higher than to make life as pleasant for themselves as they could, and to leave the world to go as it pleased. It was therefore a thoroughly secular spirit which lay at the heart of the movement. It sapped reverence, high seriousness, self-restraint. It fostered a taste for what was graceful, beautiful, intellectually or artistically refined; yet it left the mind destitute of any grand or noble aims, and exposed it to the insidious allurements of earthly ease, luxury, self-indulgence, and in many cases sensual gratification. Hence the widespread disregard of the common principles of morality which was too patent an accompaniment of the Renaissance. Learning and scholarly polish, and not goodness or rectitude, formed the passport to social recognition and favour. The freedom of action claimed and taken led to deplorable vices and unscrupulous irregularities. The standard of conduct was pagan, not Christian. The Renaissance was not

in itself immoral; nevertheless, in liberating the intellect from the trammels of scholastic and ecclesiastical authority, it liberated also from the superstitious restraints, which hitherto had so far held them in check, the baser impulses and inclinations of human nature, and these carried men away into immoral excesses with the force of a pent-up torrent. Beneath a surface of brilliant culture gross appetites and low passions were allowed to work without any curb of acknowledged moral responsibility. "Italian society exhibited an almost unexampled spectacle of literary, artistic, and courtly refinement, crossed by brutalities of lust, treason, poisonings, assassination, violence."

As is invariably the case when the educated classes are devoid of moral energy and principle, the political rulers of that period found their opportunity of augmenting their own power and swelling their pomp and magnificence. The decline of faith meant the revival of despotism, as it always will. The princes who governed the several states into which Italy was divided developed into crafty tyrants, who, while posing as liberal patrons of art and scholarship, held their people in rigid subjection, humoured them occasionally by gaudy spectacles and shows, and intrigued against each other, leading all the time lives of voluptuous pleasure, greedy self-aggrandisement, and treacherous cruelty.

To stem the tide of evil thus let loose, the Roman Church of that age was utterly incompetent. That Church, with her wide-branching influence, had grown corrupt through the very prestige of her outward success and unquestioned supremacy. Love of power, love of money, and love of display were glaringly

patent in the higher orders of her ecclesiastics, where also, in numberless instances, the private habits and connections were an open disgrace, setting an example which was only too largely followed by the rank and file of the priesthood, and by men of all grades among the laity. True religion had not altogether fled the earth; yet, although it survived in earnest hearts in hidden corners of society, the masses of the people had lapsed into a sordid, materialistic indifference; and religion, as represented by the Church of Rome, was essentially a revived pagan cult, embellished by the glittering veneer of a splendid and pompous ceremonialism.

It was amid this welter of intellectual unrest, and moral, religious, and political corruption, that Savonarola appeared. With soul acutely alive to the peril for Italy and for Europe inherent in the existing licence and grossness, the Dominican friar set himself, as his one governing aim, to work for the purification of the Church and for the restoration of society to faith and righteousness. Early in his career he caught a firm grasp of the conception so vital to the world, that moral principle, loyalty to rectitude, and reverence for the Divine will, are really the forces which make for progress. His life was an incarnation of that idea. He toiled and preached at Florence—the very heart of the Renaissance culture and pagan sensuousness—to get it realised in private conduct, social manners, and the administration of the Church and the State. He was well versed himself in the New Learning; his mind, at first steeped in scholastic lore, had opened to the fascination of the classic literature of ancient Greece; but the pure and exalted moral fervour

which breathed in the Christian Scriptures had thrilled and mastered his soul. An ardent and unwearied student, and possessed of high scholarly attainments, he was no enemy to culture; the definite object of all his effort was to consecrate culture, and make it nobler, more helpful to the world and its activities, by infusing into it the spirit of righteousness. Right in the midst of the Renaissance movement, with its restless thought, untrammelled freedom of inquiry, easy morals, and hollow religious formalism, Savonarola rose as a witness for the supreme authority of purity and goodness as absolutely essential to the advancement of mankind; and from first to last he laboured to put a higher earnestness into the manifold liberated energies of his age, striving to turn them to grander and more beneficent uses, that thereby, under such lofty inspiration, they might become mighty agencies in the world's elevation and happiness. He was not simply a Reformer, but a Prophet of Righteousness, and his life-work throughout was a strenuous testimony for righteousness. In the name of righteousness he struggled to restrain the immoralities in which not only the common people, but the educated, so freely indulged. In the name of righteousness he lifted his voice and used his influence against the vicious tyrannies which were stifling the life of Italy; and in the name of righteousness he put forth all his power for the cleansing of the Papal Court and the high places of the Church from their flagrant scandals and abuses. True, his success was not such, either in form or degree, as he had fondly hoped. But his effort told in ways and in quarters which the subsequent course of events only gradually revealed; and the spirit he

left behind had a far-reaching and silently moulding power. Sharing in the vivid mental quickening of the Renaissance, and profoundly stirred by the freer temper which it kindled, Savonarola, by his passionate protest for righteousness, rescued the Renaissance from its utterly pagan bent, and saved it from degenerating hopelessly into the moral corruption with which it was threatened through the sensuous and materialistic tendencies associated with it. He furnished the antiseptic which prevented it from festering; he communicated to it a higher and healthier impulse; and in this way he strove to make it more directly serviceable in promoting the cause of true well-being, freedom, and progress.

Thus Savonarola occupies a notable place among the men who have contributed to the shaping of history. He was the first mind in Italy, if not in Europe, to turn to effective original use the fresh intellectual life which the Renaissance had awakened—the first mind, nurtured under Renaissance influences, that struck out on a distinctly independent line, and brought the forces set free by the Renaissance to bear on some bold effort which should mark a new move forward towards a higher civilisation and a larger good for society and the race. Many others gathered up the scholarship of the Renaissance; many developed the critical faculty which it fostered; many imitated the polished grace of the restored classical literature. But to vitalise the learning and the quickened energies which the Renaissance supplied by a lofty enthusiasm for righteousness, and then so to use them as to break away into a fresh path of endeavour, suited to the needs of the age, and opening up to larger achievements in the ages to

come—that was Savonarola's distinction. Amid imitations, pedantries, dilettanteisms, and elaborate scholarly trifling, his soul burned as with a fire for the great spiritual interests of existence; and the flame touched other hearts and lives, and set them palpitating with new hopes, new and purer aspirations, to such an extent as to give a higher direction to the emancipated life and mental activity of his time, and to convert that life and activity into the upward-straining, progressive force which brought the modern world into being.

## CHAPTER II

### Boyhood, Education, and Early Mental Struggles

Girolamo Savonarola was born at Ferrara on the 14th of September 1452, the third in a family of seven children—five sons and two daughters. So far as can be learned, his father, Niccolo, a gentleman of culture, followed no definite profession, but held a favourable standing in literary and fashionable society. His mother, Elena—sprung from the noble house of Buonaccorsi at Mantua—seems to have been a woman of superior mind and decided force of character. She laid a strong hold on her son's affections, and exerted over him an influence for good which he gratefully recognised in after years.

At first Girolamo's education was mainly directed by his grandfather, Michele Savonarola, a distinguished professor and physician, who had gained renown by his medical writings and by his eminence as a teacher of science. The original home of Michele was Padua, where his family had long enjoyed an honourable name, but by the invitation of that liberal patron of learning and art, Niccolo d'Este, Marquis—soon afterwards created Duke—of Ferrara, he had been induced to remove with his household to the latter city; and

there he had been established for some years in the dignified post of physician to Niccolo's court. He is described as a kindly, devout man, esteemed by all classes for his benevolence and charity as well as for his scholarship and mental gifts. Girolamo was his favourite grandson, and, finding him an apt pupil, Michele devoted himself with loving care to the training of his mind. The boy was exceptionally reserved and silent, delighting in seclusion, and taking no part in the pastimes and amusements of those of his own age. Ferrara was often the scene of gay pageants and splendid processions; for the ruling Este family revelled in displays of lavish extravagance, and loved to flaunt their power and wealth before the people's eyes by parades of brilliant show; but none of those dazzling spectacles appears to have had any effect in kindling young Girolamo's imagination or drawing him out of himself. He lived in a quiet world of his own, and had no taste for the vivid excitements around him, thus revealing at an early stage the sombre disposition which, all through, largely coloured his life.

It was early apparent, however, that his capacities for learning were quick and keen. By the general consent of the household he was destined for the medical profession; and the grandfather took a proud pleasure in preparing him for a successful career in the same vocation as that in which his own laurels had been won. He introduced him early to the study of Roman literature, and led him on to the works of the ancient authors then held in greatest repute.

All too soon this fond and capable instructor was called away by death, and just when entering his teens

Girolamo was left to the guidance of his father for the prosecution of his educational course. He was sent to the public academy of Ferrara, where the scholastic philosophy was still in vogue. In those days, notwithstanding the spread of the New Learning, the gateway to the learned professions—the medical no less than the others—lay through the rigid logical drill which the scholastic philosophy supplied. The books in use were translations of Aristotle and commentaries on his writings, and these at the outset were the means by which the world of knowledge was opened up to youthful minds. Girolamo threw himself with ardour into this branch of study. Aristotle's skilful dialectics and subtleties of thought roused his interest intensely, and afforded a vigorous discipline for his reasoning powers; and so manifest to his teachers and fellow-students were his acuteness and grasp of apprehension, that great expectations as to his future began to be entertained.

Yet, deeply as Aristotle had stirred him, it was in the works of Thomas Aquinas, to which he next turned, that he found the most exhilarating stimulus to his intellectual enthusiasm. Here he was ushered into the realm of theological speculation, and under the leading of that new master-mind he was influenced profoundly. Instead of testing all knowledge by strict logical forms and compressing it within the accepted philosophical moulds, as the scholastic writers were accustomed to do, it was the peculiarity of Aquinas that he made the teaching of Scripture the supreme touchstone of all doctrines and beliefs. Such a method of dealing with the greatest subjects of human inquiry fairly captivated the young scholar of Ferrara, and disclosed fields of

research all the more quickening to his faculties because they were novel and fresh. From Aquinas, he afterwards said, "he had learned nearly all the knowledge he had acquired." Day after day, and often far into the night, he pored over the learned disquisitions of the "Angelical Doctor," and conned the pages of Holy Writ, till his mind was permeated and his brain fired by the lofty ideas which met a craving of his spirit, long and restlessly felt.

For, during all this time, the lad's grave, brooding disposition had been deepening steadily. In striking contrast to Francis of Assisi, whose boyhood and youth brimmed over with wild frolic and light-hearted mirth, young Savonarola held himself aloof from all the diversions and gaieties usually so tempting at his years. He was never seen in the haunts of fashionable resort, and all festive merry-making he scrupulously shunned. There were splendid receptions and assemblies occasionally held at the Este palace — a ponderous castled structure, standing in picturesque dignity in the midst of the city, with its four red-coloured square towers and massive walls; and once he was persuaded to join his parents in their attendance there, but no consideration could induce him to enter within its precincts again. It was not because he lacked interest in life or in the pursuits of his fellow-men, but because he had come more and more to look on life with serious eyes. Far from being a misanthrope, he had a tender, sympathetic heart; and he was saddened by the wrong and wickedness he beheld rampant in the world. As the years of his youth advanced, this feeling of sadness grew more pronounced. The reckless revelry of his native city pained him.

He was haunted by the horror of all the vice and crime and profanity so patent on every hand — the gross frivolity of the masses, the corruption of those in high places, the shameless lives of the magnates of society, and even of many of the great dignitaries of the Church. For it was an age of deep moral degeneracy in which his lot was cast. Men plumed themselves on their learning and their culture, their taste for literature and the arts. The new impulse to study and thought given by the reintroduction into Western Europe of the great masterpieces of ancient Greek poetry and philosophy, which for generations had fallen into neglect, was at this time creating a vague unsettlement on every hand. The Renaissance was now coming in like a flood, and all over Italy fresh ideas were stirring, the general mind was breaking free from stereotyped beliefs and long-established routine. But along with the intellectual quickening thus produced, there was also a grave loosening of all moral restraints, a widespread abandonment to the laxity and the sensuousness of the old pagan life. As Savonarola looked round with that earnest gaze of his, and pondered it all, his soul rose in indignation. Religion had early touched him with its solemn and august ideas, but now his religious feelings took on a more melancholy hue. Life and the world became to his vision all vanity and vexation of spirit; and this impression was deepened when, in his later youth, Ferrara was turned into an arena of fierce and deadly strife over a dispute regarding the succession to the Este dukedom, and he saw the streets run with the blood of slaughtered citizens.

Thus the sad condition of society lay like a burden

on his heart. Seasons of prayer and fasting, and of silent devotion in church, became more prolonged and frequent. In lonely walks, too, outside the city gates, and along the green banks of the Po, he spent hours revolving in thought the decay of goodness and the hopeless depravity of the times. What were all the subtle speculations of the schools, what all the glitter and spell of the New Learning, when sin and debasement were blighting and darkening the whole aspect of human life!

Sometimes he found a solace in playing on his lute, soothing the agitations of his soul by the charms of music. Sometimes, again, like many another youth, brooding over the evils of the world and the mysteries of existence, he sought in verse composition a relief to his pent-up emotions. In 1472, when twenty years of age, he wrote a poem entitled "De Ruina Mundi," which is particularly remarkable, not for any graces of diction, but for the terseness and vigour with which it gives voice to his deep religious passion and the sorrow he felt in view of the prevailing corruption. It is certainly a gloomy enough picture which the poem presents of the vices and wrongs of an impious generation,—the whole world turned from God, and abandoned to pride, luxury, and licentiousness; all virtue and goodness vanished, nowhere a shining light, no one taking shame for his sins; the sceptre swayed by men who wait for prey, honours and wealth falling to those who rob widows and orphans entrusted to their care, and trample on the poor; and while the writer declares that were it not for his belief in Providence he would have been utterly confounded, he breathes a prayer that his own heart may be kept unstained.

Into the very midst of those gloomy reflections there broke a gleam of youthful romance, which promised for a while to refresh his spirit and brighten his conception of the world and of life. There had come to reside at Ferrara, and in the house next to Savonarola's home, an exiled citizen of Florence, of the noble family of the Strozzi, bringing with him a natural daughter, whose beauty captivated the moody student's affections. The spell of life's young dream was upon him, and for a time he revelled in visions of happiness. One day, however, the spell was rudely broken, for when he availed himself of an opportunity which offered to avow his love and his hope, he was met with a repulse of haughty scorn—"Do you imagine that the blood and the great house of the Strozzi could form an alliance with that of Savonarola?" Staggered for the moment, the mortified suitor was provoked to reply to the lady by a stinging reminder of the stain resting on her birth; and that rendered the rupture hopeless and complete.

Thrown back once more on his own dark thoughts, Savonarola began to contemplate the idea of devoting himself exclusively to the religious life. He had gradually given up all thought of entering the medical profession; and the world looked so vain and evil in his eyes, that the only rest possible, as it seemed, was to retire from its wretched debasement and shut himself up within holy walls. Yet he had great and serious hesitations ere he could determine on so momentous a step, hesitations arising chiefly from a sense of the grief and disappointment to his parents which he would thereby cause; and so for two or three years he lingered in troubled perplexity, praying

again and again for light as to the path he should take. Once, it is told, he spent a whole night in anxious thought regarding his course, having first sprinkled his body with the coldest water to keep his brain clear and assist his meditations. He turned to the writings of Plato, which were then engaging the keenest interest in all the learned circles of the land, but though he thus derived a vivid intellectual pleasure, his religious instincts were not satisfied, and a restless anxiety still haunted him.

At last the way to a decision was cleared by a sermon he chanced to hear during a visit to Faenza, where he entered a church in which an Augustinian monk was preaching. The monk spoke some impressive, searching word, a word which Savonarola would never repeat, but which to the end he carried in his heart, and that word settled for him the critical question which he had been pondering over so long. He returned to Ferrara resolved to consecrate himself to the monastic life.

Yet the resolution was hard to put into effect. It seemed as if his mother divined what was coming, and was following his every mood and movement with watchful and pained concern. He feared to reveal his secret, lest he should break down and abandon his purpose; and for another year, therefore, the mental struggle went on. Then came an incident which all his biographers dwell upon with peculiar tenderness. One day, moved by the pressure of feeling within, he took his lute and played on it a strain so melancholy that his mother turned upon him with a look of intense sorrow, and exclaimed, "My son, that is a sign of parting;" but by a great effort he

kept his eyes on the ground and continued with trembling hand to touch the strings, without venturing to answer.

A sign of parting it actually proved; for, on the day following, the 24th of April 1475, the irrevocable step was taken. It was the festival of St. George, and all Ferrara was gay with holiday crowds and tokens of rejoicing; and when the rest of the family had gone forth to join in the celebration, Savonarola stole quietly from his father's house, walked the twenty-eight miles across the plains to Bologna, and there knocked for admission at the doors of the Dominican convent, where he was at once received as a novice, leaving, as he devoutly imagined, the world with its vices and vanities behind him.

After he had gone, there was found among his books and papers a short essay, entitled "On Contempt of the World," which shows how painfully he had been impressed by the wickedness around him. "Everything is full of impiety, of usury and robbery, foul and wicked blasphemies, fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness, murder and envy, ambition and pride, hypocrisy and falseness, crime and iniquity. Virtues are turned into vices, and vices into virtues. . . . Men are summoned to penitence by disasters, earthquakes, and storms of wind; but they do not hearken. They are summoned by floods, diseases, famines; but they do not hearken. They are summoned by the impious deeds of the overweening Turks; but they do not hearken. They are summoned by the affectionate voices of preachers and servants of God; but they do not hearken. All, in fine, are summoned by the natural pricks of conscience; but they do not hearken."

Two days later he wrote a letter to his father, with a view to assuage the grief which he knew was sure to be felt in the home he had so secretly forsaken. It is a memorable letter, in which the calm, deliberate resolve of the youthful ascetic is exquisitely touched with the tenderness of a loving son. It contains his reasons for abandoning the world and choosing the religious life. The desire arose, he said, from beholding "the iniquity of men, the debauchery, the adultery, the theft, the pride, the idolatry, the dreadful profaneness into which the age has fallen, so that one can no longer find a righteous man. For this many times a day have I uttered this verse with tears—'Heu fuge crudeles terras! fuge litus avarum! And this because I could not endure the great wickedness of certain parts of Italy. Everywhere I saw virtue despised and vice held in honour. This was the greatest suffering I could have in this world; therefore daily I entreated my Lord Jesus Christ, that He would raise me from the mire. Continually I made my prayer with the greatest devotion to God, saying, 'Show me the path in which I should walk, for to Thee do I lift up my soul.' Now God has been pleased in His infinite mercy to show it to me, and I have received it. . . . O Jesus, rather let me die a thousand deaths than that I should be so ungrateful as to oppose Thy will. Then, my dearest father, you have rather to thank our Jesus than to weep. He gave you a son, and has not only preserved him to some extent from evil to the age of twenty-two years, but has vouchsafed to choose him for His knight militant. And do you not consider it a great mercy to have a son made a knight of Jesus Christ? . . . Do you not think it is a great affliction to me to be separated from

you? Believe me, never since I was born had I greater sorrow and anguish of mind than in abandoning my own father, and going away among strangers, to sacrifice my body to Jesus Christ, and to give up my own will to those whom I never knew. . . . Because I know you lament that I left you secretly, almost as a fugitive, let me tell you that such was my distress and the suffering of my inmost soul at having to leave you, that if I had expressed it, I verily believe my heart would have broken, and I should have changed my purpose; therefore do not wonder that I did not tell you. . . . I beg you then, my dearest father, to cease to weep; give me not more sadness and grief than I have,—not of regret for what I have done, for indeed I would not revoke that though I expected to become greater than Cæsar Augustus; but because I am of flesh, as you are, and sense is opposed to reason, and I must maintain a cruel warfare, that the devil may not gain advantage over me. . . . Nothing remains, but that I beseech you that, as a man of strong mind, you would comfort my mother; and I beg her and you to bestow your blessing upon me, and I will ever pray for your souls."

With those words Savonarola bade farewell to his father's house and to the associations of his youth.

## CHAPTER III

### Monastic Life at Bologna

Savonarola was in his twenty-third year when he passed within the gates of the convent of St. Dominic at Bologna and took upon him the monastic vows. His choice of a refuge among the Dominican friars was chiefly determined, no doubt, by his love for Thomas Aquinas, who had been a distinguished ornament of that order. In applying for entrance he made no pretensions to peculiar sanctity, but with deepest humility asked only to be received as a lay brother, and to be permitted to perform the most menial duties—to work in the garden, make clothes for the monks, or discharge the domestic services required by the brethren. The special attraction which the retirement of the monastic life might be supposed to have for him, as offering an opportunity of indulging his intellectual tastes and pursuing his favourite studies, did not, at the outset at least, exercise much influence over his mind. His one mastering desire was to escape from the distractions and iniquities of the world, do penance for his sins, and devote himself to quiet communion with God.

And soon the sincerity of his purpose was manifest in the austere habits he practised within the convent walls. He was conscientiously strict in rendering obedi-

ence to his superiors and to the rules of the order. His fasts were severe, his vigils of prayer long and frequently renewed; and to his companions, Fra Girolamo, with his spare figure, worn to a shadow by rigid self-mortifications, appeared like a ghost moving about in their midst. He ate only enough to sustain life. His garments were of the coarsest kind, though always scrupulously clean. His bed was a sack of straw laid on roughly crossed pieces of wood, and its only covering a blanket of wool. By such austerities he sought to calm his soul and rise into closer fellowship with the Divine mind and will.

Speedily enough, however, he discovered that, though the pursuits of the world had been relinquished, the spirit of the world had not been escaped. Ambition and selfishness, he found, were little less actively at work under monkish hoods and amid monastic seclusion than in the busy haunts of men, and the aims cherished there were neither so pure nor so lofty as he had fondly dreamed. Disappointing, too, was the revelation, which ere long dawned upon him, of the corruption that festered behind the imposing stateliness of ecclesiastical life. For, admitted now, as he was, within the cloisters, he saw the religious world *from the inside*, and was shocked and vexed by what he beheld. More fully than ever he became aware of the gross scandals and abuses of the Church—of the intrigues of cardinals and prelates for place and power, of the bribes offered and taken for dignities and preferment, of the immoralities practised even at Rome itself, and of the infamous avarice and unscrupulousness of the reigning Pope, Sixtus IV.—a man whose low and grasping ways contributed to the

degradation of the Papacy to a degree which was productive of endless evil in his own time and long after he had gone. Such flagrant iniquities in the sacred province of religion moved the depths of Fra Girolamo's righteous soul, and within a year of his entrance into the convent he wrote a poem, "De Ruina Ecclesiae," in which his holy anger flashed forth. The poem is full of symbolism and brilliant imagery. Savonarola describes the Church as appearing to him in the guise of a chaste and venerable virgin, and from her forlorn, dishevelled aspect he is prompted to exclaim, Where are the precious stones and the fine diamonds, where the burning lamps of faith, the beautiful sapphires, the white robes of purity, the sweet chaunts of devotion of former days? And when he asks, Who it is that has thus dethroned her and marred her peace? she tells him that her place has been invaded by "a false, proud harlot," and that she has been driven to seek shelter in a poor cave, where she leads her sad life with many a tear. Then she takes him to her lonely refuge, and shows him the wounds from which she is suffering, until his heart is fired with indignation, and he bursts out in a passionate yearning to shatter and beat down the horrible system of wrong: "O God, lady, that I could break those great wings!" But the only reply he receives is, that mortal tongue must not speak of it, nor is it allowed to take up arms: "Weep and be silent, for this is best."

He did keep silent, restraining himself with difficulty from delivering the vehement protest to which he felt inwardly impelled. New work was given him which served to occupy his time, and in a measure also

to divert his thoughts. He was raised above the position of a mere lay brother, for which at first he had so humbly craved. For his superiors in the convent were not long in discovering that they had a scholar of exceptional learning and ability in their midst, and they resolved to turn his gifts to account in a higher form of usefulness than that in which he had requested to be employed. He was called upon to undertake the duty of teaching the novices and superintending their studies in philosophy and theology. The task was one which he accepted with reluctance. It threw him back once more amid the arid subtleties and dialectics of the Schoolmen—"from the Aristotle of the world to the Aristotle of the cloister;" it interfered with the leisure for retirement and devotion which he had hoped to enjoy, while it disappointed the craving of his spirit for contact with living truth and Divine realities; and hence, though he yielded a due obedience, his heart secretly rebelled.

Gradually, however, he secured time for the studies more congenial to his bent and taste. His old favourite, Thomas Aquinas, he never abandoned. He also resumed his acquaintance with Plato. Though swayed by ideals higher than those of the Humanists, his intellectual interest, which could not be suppressed, made him susceptible to the attractions of the recovered Greek literature which the Humanists so ardently extolled, and on the knowledge of which they set so great a value. And in reading the Dialogues of Plato, with their imaginative glow and mystic depths and heights, he felt himself in contact with a rich and superbly endowed mind. His own mind was fertilised and stimulated; and he made some efforts

to employ his literary powers on the themes which the great Greek thinker discussed. The attempt, however, was ultimately relinquished, after his view of the practical worth of such studies underwent a change. There grew on him more and more a feeling of the vanity of all mere human speculation—a feeling that found expression in one of his discourses at a later date: "What does all this wisdom of philosophy serve for, if a poor old woman, established in the faith, knows more of the true wisdom than Plato?" He turned with ever-increasing relish to works of devotion like those of Cassian and Augustine, and thus sought to feed his inner life. But it was in the Holy Scriptures that he found the most satisfying nourishment for the needs of his heart. He is said to have committed the whole of the sacred books to memory, thus acquiring a mastery of biblical ideas and also of biblical phraseology which furnished him with an undoubted source of power in his work in after years. The Old Testament especially attracted him. He revelled in its bold and startling imagery, its vivid and stirring appeals, its stern denunciations of sin, its awful warnings of judgment in the name of a Righteous God; for it seemed to his mind that nothing could be more suited to the needs of his own time, or more fitted to shake the evil world around him and arrest the wickedness abounding alike in society, Church, and State. And as he pondered ever more deeply the burning words of the ancient prophets, his soul was kindled to impassioned fervour, till often he felt as if he were himself inspired. It was then, too, that he began the practice which he carried on through life, of making notes in his own

minute and beautiful handwriting on the margins of his Bible and favourite devotional books.

Thus at Bologna, amid steady work in scholastic teaching, varied by strict vigils of prayer and reverent study of Scripture, the mind and soul of Fra Girolamo unfolded towards maturity. But the Dominican brethren were distinctively a preaching order. It was one of their recognised functions to rear a succession of men trained to stand in the pulpit and administer religious instruction to the crowd of worshippers; and in course of time it was determined to employ the talented and zealous young friar in this department of work. Accordingly, he was sent to visit several of the convents in other cities of Northern Italy, that through them he might obtain opportunities of speaking in the churches. It was thus that in 1481 he was appointed to preach at Ferrara, his native city. He went there with no willing mind, for, having formed an austere conception of his vocation as a monk, he dreaded any revival of the associations and affections of former years. Consequently, he held but little intercourse with his own family, and from all ordinary acquaintances kept entirely aloof. So far as his preaching was concerned, no appreciable impression appears to have been produced. His sermons failed to tell,—partly, it may have been, because, as he said, quoting the words of Christ, "no man is a prophet in his own country," or perhaps chiefly because he was yet only a novice in the practice of public speech. He could touch the conscience with marvellous success when engaged in close personal dealing with men, as in the case specially recorded, of his encounter with some profane, blaspheming soldiers, who were journeying with him once

in a boat on the Po, and who were so affected by his searching remonstrances and appeals, that they threw themselves in contrition at his feet, crying for absolution. But in the pulpit, when addressing men in the mass, he had not yet found his power.

Meanwhile, the clouds of war were gathering over the land. Hostilities were threatened against Ferrara by the Venetians, on the one hand, and on the other by Pope Sixtus IV., who saw an opportunity of furthering the fortunes of his family and securing a share of the spoil. In the general anxiety which prevailed, most of the Dominican monks were ordered by their Superior to retire to places of safety. Savonarola was instructed to proceed, not to his own monastery at Bologna, with which he had been connected now for well-nigh seven years, but to the convent of San Marco at Florence; and to Florence accordingly he went, there to find the scene of the real distinctive work of his life, though all unaware as yet of the actual form which that work would assume, and little divining the brilliant triumphs which would attend it, or the tragic climax to which it would lead.

# CHAPTER IV

## Florence, San Marco, and Lorenzo de Medici

It is easy to imagine the glow of exhilaration and hope which would kindle the heart of the young friar as, on crossing the Apennines, he looked down on the valley of the Arno, and the vision of Florence with its Cathedral dome, tall towers, gleaming river, and stately array of buildings and bridges, all set in a sunny landscape of vineyards and olive-gardens, burst upon his gaze; for then, as now, Florence, beheld from the slopes of the Tuscan hills, must have been a ravishing sight. He had left Ferrara saddened by profound sorrow for the calamities of the country, but the spectacle of that fair city, where nature and art have combined to create a picture of superb loveliness, was surely fitted in some measure at least to chase away the shadows which darkened his soul.

There was much also in the convent of San Marco which might be expected to soothe and brighten his thoughts. Rebuilt a generation before, through the liberality of Cosimo de Medici, as a home for a reformed community of Dominicans, that convent had been endowed with a library of rare value, and beautified by the works of the Fra Beato Angelico which adorned its walls. The outer cloister, the chapter-

house, the very cells even, all shone with the delicately coloured frescoes, still quite fresh, of the pure and sweet-souled artist-monk, who often painted with the tears streaming down his cheeks. Those frescoes themselves possessed a peculiar charm, while the lofty conceptions they embodied were singularly adapted to minister to devotion and prayer.

Moreover, the memory of the first Prior, the good and saintly Antonino, still lingered as a subtle, elevating influence about the place. Antonino had been the pattern of pious aspiration, the friend of reverent study, the apostle of charity; and his meek spirit, active benevolence, and love of all that was noble and pure, had left its impress in a higher standard of thought and life. Thus San Marco had become a centre of attraction for the more learned and devout brothers of the order, and for many men of distinction who sought refreshment for their spirit in the atmosphere of superior refinement and earnestness which breathed around.

Such was the convent within which Savonarola, on coming to Florence, took up his abode. And outside was the teeming city, with its chatty, shrewd, quick-witted, energetic people; its gay, sprightly, vigorous life; its heavy-fronted streets and massive, sombre squares, relieved here and there by exquisite specimens of the architect's, sculptor's, or bronze-designer's art; its imposing churches and their hosts of priests; its skilled handicrafts, its shops and bustling markets, and great commercial houses, where a flourishing trade was carried on; and over all, the pervasive, masterful rule of its Medici prince, whose versatile genius, force of character, and astute states-

manship made him one of the foremost figures of his time. Savonarola was now close to the beat of a larger, more vivid life than ever he had yet known.

Gradually, however, as he looked out on that vivid life from the cloistered seclusion of San Marco, he began to perceive much that was calculated to cast a shadow once more over his naturally brooding mind. For generations Florence enjoyed the rank and privileges of a free republic, but since the days when the house of Medici rose to power, though the form of a republic was still maintained, the freedom was practically gone. The first stroke was dealt by Cosimo de Medici, who, taking advantage of internal dissension, succeeded by an adroit use of his vast wealth and popularity in working himself up to a position of supremacy, nominating the regular magistrates and holding the control of the State in his own hands. Yet, in spite of his unscrupulous ambition and the mercilessness he could on occasion display, it must be said that Cosimo de Medici kept a firm grasp on the regard of the people by his munificent charity, his zeal in beautifying Florence, and his liberality in promoting culture and all branches of artistic work. He was followed by his son Piero, who died after a brief term of rule. Then came the famous Lorenzo de Medici, whose gifts and splendour were throwing a glamour over Florence and all Italy when Savonarola arrived.

Like his grandfather Cosimo, Lorenzo de Medici was borne up in the exercise of dictatorial power by a strong current of popular favour. He was brilliant, affable, and full of wit, and the very dash of his personality drew to him an immense amount of admira-

tion. He knew how to humour the citizens and reconcile them to the loss of their liberty by frequent shows, processions, and public festivities, and by the profuse embellishment of the city with buildings in which they could feel a sort of patriotic pride. He was, moreover, an ardent patron of learning and art. Highly cultured himself, and eager to encourage every type of intellectual ability, he gathered round him a constellation of scholars and poets, architects and painters, whose reflected beams cast a radiance round his head. Among the eminent figures in that brilliant group was Marsilio Ficino, the head of the Platonic Academy, and an indefatigable student of Plato's writings, who signalised himself by his endeavours to reconcile the speculations of Greek philosophy with the doctrines of the Christian creed. Then there was Pico Mirandola, the master of many languages, and devourer of all knowledge, whose versatile gifts and manifold acquirements made him a wonder to his contemporaries. A special favourite was Angelo Poliziano, the most accomplished scholar of his day, and a distinguished teacher, who drew about him pupils from the great cities of Italy and from the distant parts of Europe, and who was celebrated also for his elegant poetry and epigrammatic wit. There was also Luigi Pulci, the clever satirist, and author of the famous burlesque *Il Morgante Maggiore*, in which the romances of mediæval chivalry were parodied with remarkable skill, humour, and lively play of imaginative invention. Occasionally, also, a promising genius was taken into the palace, and kept and provided for there at the great patron's expense—a privilege which, it is interesting to note, the young Michael Angelo was actually enjoying at that very date.

The presence at his court of such an array of shining talent, together with his sagacity as a statesman and his dexterous management of public affairs, encircled the name of Lorenzo the Magnificent with a lustre unequalled among the rulers of that age.

But the spirit of faction and envy is not easily quelled, and some years before, in 1478, while Savonarola was still at Bologna, the life of Lorenzo had been seriously threatened by the notorious Pazzi conspiracy. The Pazzi were an influential family who secretly plotted to undermine the Medici rule. They were joined in the plot by two powerful personages, Count Riario, a nephew of the Pope, and Archbishop Salviati of Pisa, and these acted the principal part in devising the assassination of Lorenzo. Pope Sixtus IV. was cognisant of the design, and expected from Lorenzo's downfall a substantial aggrandisement to his relatives, but he was careful to withhold any word or sign which might implicate him directly in the deed of murder by which the object of the plot was to be secured. The scene of the crime was the Cathedral of Florence, the agent a priest, the time the celebration of the Mass when the members of the Medici court were present, and the signal the elevation of the Host. The priest's hand faltered, and the dagger-thrust missed its mark. Lorenzo's brother Giuliano was slain; Lorenzo himself, drawing his sword, fought his way to the sacristy and escaped.

That menace to the life and power of their prince rallied round him the sympathies of the people, and contributed to establish Lorenzo more securely in his absolute sway. There were many who resented in secret the curtailment of their privileges, and writhed

under the veiled despotism in which they were held; but the great body of the citizens contentedly accepted the despotism, spellbound by the glory and splendour of Lorenzo's state, and by the pleasure and prosperity that seemed to be associated with his rule.

The splendour and prosperity were on the surface; there was moral deterioration beneath. In architectural and sculptured adornment, intellectual activity, wide-awake interest in learning and culture, Florence stood pre-eminent among the cities of that age. There, in all the different forms of art, the Renaissance had borne its richest fruit, as the unrivalled works of Giotto, Botticelli, Brunelleschi, Bartolommeo, Ghiberti, and many others, existed to show. There also in other directions the most brilliant powers of the human mind had reawakened to a singular degree of vigour and life. Florence had become a second Athens, but with the pagan spirit of Athens also reproduced. The Platonic Academy flourished; scholarship and philosophy were keenly pursued; yet the prevailing tone of society was dissolute and low—on every side luxury and extravagance, levity and voluptuousness, love of pleasure and greed of gain. And as for religion, although its ceremonies were formally, and on festival days ostentatiously, observed, its real life, its spiritual aspirations, were gone. The barren speculations of the pulpit and the too manifest worldliness and corruption of the leaders of the Church, had robbed it of all elevating power over the mass of the population. Only in a few devout souls here and there did any living faith survive; and notwithstanding all its culture and beauty and restless energy, Florence was fast degenerating into a scene of glittering godlessness.

Lorenzo's example served to foster the demoralisation. The dissolute orgies in which he frequently indulged, and the ribald songs he composed for general use at the Carnival season, polished in style but coarse and obscene in sentiment, tended still further to encourage the debased tendencies of the popular mind. It was no uncommon occurrence for him, after a day spent in public business, and a few hours of discussion on high themes at the Platonic Academy, to sally forth at night into the city at the head of a band of revellers, to sing his "Canti Carnascialeschi," and to take part in vicious excesses.

This serious moral degeneracy at work underneath the flashing material magnificence soon struck the eye and heart of Fra Girolamo, as he watched the vivid life of the city from his quiet retreat at San Marco. He had duties to discharge in the convent, however, which largely occupied his time and energies; for here, as at Bologna, the training of the novices was entrusted to his care, and he gave himself to the work with a self-devotion and power which in a brief space arrested attention. Coming before his students sometimes in a sort of seraphic ecstasy, or sometimes with his eyes bathed in tears, he sought to stir their enthusiasm in the study of the Scriptures, and woke in them towards himself an admiration which was strongly tinged with reverence.

In a few months he was appointed to preach the Lenten sermons in the church of San Lorenzo; but this first attempt in the pulpit at Florence in 1482 was an utter failure. He was burning with ardour to convert the world and renew the lives of men, but his precipitate manner, harsh voice, and awkward gestures

were all against him. He was lacking in the graces of oratory; his ideas were too fine and elevated for the popular taste; and his denunciations of vice met with no sympathetic response. The audience fell away, until at the end of the course there were only twenty-five persons left to listen to him. At that time the pulpit-favourite of the Florentine public was Mariano da Gennazzano, a preaching monk of the Augustinian order, who delighted the votaries of the New Learning by quotations from their much-vaunted classical authors, and whose musical voice, harmonious cadences, grand sentences, and rhetorical pauses, according to the description of Poliziano, had a captivating effect on the ear. Mariano was a distinguished specimen of the fashionable preachers of the day, skilful in suiting himself to the tastes of rank and culture, and lulling rather than rousing the consciences of men. In comparison with such an orator, Savonarola, with his austere doctrine and clumsy delivery, was regarded as flat and tame.

The failure was a severe disappointment; and so acutely was he pained by it, that, as one of his early biographers states, he resolved to renounce the work of preaching for ever. He retired to his duties of Bible instruction in the convent, and was thus quietly engaged when a summons came which furnished an opportunity of revealing his capacity and force of character in a way no longer possible to ignore.

# CHAPTER V

## The Leap into Fame

The summons which called Fra Girolamo away from his quiet work among the novices at San Marco was a command from his superiors to attend a Chapter-General of the Lombard Dominicans to be held in the city of Reggio. This was a gathering at which not only a large number of distinguished ecclesiastics and theologians, but also many laymen of note in the world of letters, were assembled. It is not easy to discover with any clearness the part which Savonarola took in the proceedings of the Chapter; all that can be definitely ascertained is, that by the appearances he made in its discussions the hitherto obscure monk of San Marco was lifted at once into notice as a man of unusual promise, certain to be heard of again. Among those present who were particularly impressed by the conspicuous ability he displayed, was the youthful Count Pico della Mirandola, already mentioned as one of the favourites at the Medici court. This gifted man, with his gracious bearing, fair and open countenance, and long golden hair waving down on his shoulders, excited admiration wherever he appeared. He had beauty and rank, fame and riches. He had visited the most renowned universities of France and

Italy, and gathered knowledge from every source. His command of many tongues—Greek and Latin, Syriac, Hebrew, and Chaldee; his wide acquaintance with philosophy and science, his marvellous memory and versatility of mind—had raised him to celebrity as a prodigy of learning. This brilliant genius was irresistibly attracted towards Savonarola, and the friendly interest thus awakened led the Count at a later date to use his influence with Lorenzo de Medici in bringing about the recall of the friar to Florence after an absence of several years.

The Chapter-General at Reggio took place in 1482, and Savonarola returned from it to San Marco not only a marked man among the ecclesiastics of Lombardy, but a man in whose breast the conviction of a Divine mission was beginning to dawn. He took up once more his work among the novices; yet, as he looked out on the sins and follies of the city around him, and on the too patent scandals still rife in the Church, and as he brooded and prayed in his cell, he felt rising within the conviction of a great task, to which, by his growing sense of power and by the righteous fervour of his heart, he seemed to be called. There is truth in Lowell's words—

> "Souls destined to o'erleap the vulgar lot,
> And mould the world unto the scheme of God,
> Have a fore-consciousness of their high doom."

And Savonarola had become aware of a secret prophetic instinct, pointing to some peculiar and sacred work for which he was marked out in the designs of the Most High.

Strange visions came to him in his lonely vigils

of contemplation and prayer. The calamities that threatened the Church passed before his gaze; he heard voices urging him to announce the coming perils and to rouse men to repentance and faith. It was two years, however, ere the way was opened for the delivery of his message. In 1484 he was sent to the town of San Gemignano, among the hills of Siena, where a people as yet uncorrupted by the loose vices of the time lived, surrounded by beautiful churches, tall towers, and many monuments of mediæval art. There for the first time he ventured to unfold his prophetic programme, and put forth the three propositions which were to form the burden of his preaching all through life:—(1) that the Church will be scourged; (2) that it will afterwards be regenerated; (3) that this will come to pass soon. These points he enforced by constant reference to Scripture, drawing particularly from the Old Testament startling illustrations of the Divine judgments which the evils of society and the abuses of religion must inevitably incur.

Circumstances had transpired at Rome which lent additional force to his conviction that some such judgment was near. Sixtus IV. had died, and it was notorious that Innocent VIII., his successor, had owed his election to fraud and bribery. Instead of the Papal Court being cleansed, as many hoped it might be, the pollution had become worse than ever. The new Pope had sons of his own, whose advancement he schemed for with unblushing effrontery, while the ecclesiastics whom he drew around himself and raised to the chief dignities were a set of corrupt men whose vices were an open scandal; and by such a pernicious example at the very centre of Christendom, encourage-

ment was given to the already too profligate tendencies of the highly-placed and the wealthy throughout the country.

With all this in view, Savonarola was possessed with the certainty of coming disaster, and he felt himself divinely impelled to declare it. The assurance of having a definite message gave point to his style and freedom to his utterance to a degree never experienced before. His hearers were visibly affected; and in the consciousness of having wakened in other minds a thrill of sympathy with his own, he gained encouragement and strength.

It was at Brescia, however, where he was appointed to preach in 1486, that the long-struggling passion and energy of his soul burst out with unmistakable force. The Apocalypse of John, which he chose as his subject, afforded ample scope for uttering the thoughts which had smouldered in his breast for years. The burning words which poured from him, denouncing sin and urging repentance, pierced men's consciences and shook them out of their stolid indifference. The crowd round his pulpit grew larger and larger; and the people were awestruck when one day he described the four-and-twenty elders, and pictured one of them as rising up to declare the terrible doom which awaited Italy, and especially the city of Brescia, when blood would run in the streets, and fathers and mothers would see their children massacred before their eyes, and all would be slaughter and ruin—a prediction which was verified some years afterwards in the storming of the city by the French. The effect of this startling picture and style of discourse was immensely heightened by the statement made by one of his companions, that the Fra

Girolamo had stood in an ecstasy for five hours, with his face shining so as to illuminate the whole church where he was.

The preaching was a failure no longer. Its prophet-like fervour and inspiration awoke an enthusiasm of admiration and wonder, and his fame spread. Savonarola at last had found his power. He could use the pulpit as a vantage-ground from which to reach and move the hearts of men in the name of his Divine Lord and Master. All that he had now to wait for was a sphere sufficiently large and sufficiently central for the effective exercise of his gifts in stemming the tide of ungodliness.

From Brescia, where he appears to have spent a considerable time, the authorities of his order directed him to pass on to other cities. It is impossible to trace his movements in detail, but for fully four years he was kept employed in various parts of Northern Italy. In several respects this preaching tour was of great value: it afforded him abundant practice in public speaking; it gave him experience in dealing with men in the mass, and in handling religious questions in such a way as to appeal to the popular interest and intelligence; and thus it helped him to acquire confidence in his own ability to render some real spiritual service to his generation. In the later stages of the tour we find him at Pavia, where, on the eve of leaving for Genoa, he wrote a letter to his mother, throbbing with the warm tenderness of a still unquenched natural affection, and at the same time revealing the consecrated spirit that animated him in his work. "Be assured," he said, "that I am more determined than ever to devote body and soul and all the knowledge which God has given

me, for the love of Him, to the good of my neighbour; and since I cannot do it at home, I will do it abroad." In the spirit thus expressed he was still labouring, when he received a message calling him back unexpectedly to his old place in the convent of San Marco.

# CHAPTER VI

## Florence again—The Mission Found, and the Sphere

Count Pico della Mirandola had not lost his interest in the dark-faced friar whose mental power and high-toned utterances had produced a profound impression at the Chapter-General at Reggio; and as the fame of the preaching in the northern cities became more pronounced, the scholarly noble was moved to urge his friend Lorenzo de Medici to secure the return of such a man as an ornament to his city. Lorenzo agreed to the proposal; the Prior of San Marco was apprised of his wish, and issued the order required. So, in 1489, Savonarola was recalled to Florence; and from that date he advanced with steady, rapid strides to all that was most marvellous and masterful as well as most pathetic in his career.

In great weakness of body he took his weary journey on foot, until, utterly breaking down under the heat, he sank helpless by the roadside. There he was rescued by a stranger, who, according to the legendary embellishment of the story, after seeing to his recovery at the nearest inn and conducting him on his way as far as the San Gallo Gate, suddenly left him, with the

parting injunction, "Remember to do that for which God hath sent thee."

He had indeed come back to Florence with a sense of his Heaven-given mission strong within him. When he left the city a few years before, it was with a pained disappointment at the failure of his efforts to touch the public conscience, or even to catch the public ear. Now, on his return, he was aware of expanding powers in himself and of high expectations in the minds of others regarding him. He was in his thirty-seventh year, in the prime of his age and of his intellectual strength; and he came back amid the old scenes with all the prestige for sanctity and eloquence which his labours in the provinces had won.

At first he went to work quietly at San Marco, and betook himself once more to the instruction of the novices. Gradually, however, the older monks gathered round in the room where he taught, to share the stimulus of his quickening thought and flashes of impassioned speech. Outsiders also were attracted—men of learning from the city, eager to hear the man who had so singularly emerged from obscurity into renown. In the summer of 1490, during a course of lectures on the Apocalypse, the numbers thus pressing in were so large that it was found necessary to resort to the convent garden, where, day after day, under a tree of damask roses, and surrounded by the arched pillars of the square white cloister and the frescoes of Angelico, Fra Girolamo, with one hand grasping his book and the other stretched on high, addressed his strangely mixed audience, and poured out his soul on the great themes that possessed him. At length he was besieged by entreaties to mount the pulpit and

make a more public appearance as a preacher; and although he hesitated for a time, he ultimately announced that on the next Sunday he would speak in church and lecture, adding, as one of his earliest biographers asserts, "And I shall preach for eight years,"—the very period over which his public ministry in Florence actually extended.

Accordingly, on the 1st of August 1490, Fra Girolamo ascended the pulpit of the convent church of San Marco. There was a dense throng massed together in the not very spacious building. The excitement and curiosity were so keen that many were glad to obtain standing-room anywhere, and even to cling to the railings, if only they might see the face and hear the voice of the preacher whom a few years before they had treated with chilling indifference. He went on with the exposition of the Apocalypse which he had begun in the convent garden; and here again, as in his preaching tour in the north, he laboured to develop his three famous propositions, with a growing confidence and a kindling fire of earnestness which kept the crowd week after week aroused and riveted. It was ever the same message—the Church is corrupt unto its very core; its central throne even is rotten; Italy, the Paradise of earth, has become a spiritual wilderness, a land of idols and an abomination to the Lord; the Church of Italy must be punished in order to be reformed.

The interest awakened was not altogether favourable. His hearers were divided. Some resented his sharp denunciations and reproofs; some sneered at his gloomy prophecies of evil; some treated his visions and revelations as either a hypocrisy or a delusion; some

had no sympathy with the lofty strain of feeling in which he indulged; while some questioned his title to pose so authoritatively as the moral censor of the Church and of society. Yet there was one thing which all were compelled to recognise, and that was the blaze and sweep of his eloquence, which had in it no cunning tricks or studied arts, but burst forth ever and anon with a spontaneous rush that awed the listeners into breathless amazement. It was a style of preaching which had not been heard for many a day. Notwithstanding occasional intricacies of philosophical ingenuity and fanciful allegorising, it was characterised by a dash, a pungency, an incisive directness of phrase, under which it was possible for no audience to remain long unmoved.

When the Lent of 1491 came round, Savonarola received a summons to deliver the course of sermons for the season in the Cathedral. The crowd followed him in vaster numbers than ever; and there, in that immense sombre building, so bare and yet so stately, with its "dim religious light" deepening the effect of its massive simplicity, the friar of San Marco became at once a dominant force in Florentine affairs, and began the work which has earned for him his peculiar place in history. For in gaining access to the Cathedral pulpit Savonarola had reached his throne. From that pulpit he was now about to establish a sway over Florence which would revive the waning cause of righteousness and liberty, and shake to its foundations the powerful rule of the Medici itself. The monk preaching in the Duomo was ere long to be the lawgiver of the city, issuing his injunctions in the name of the Most High. To his own mind by this time his

vocation had become thoroughly clear; he was to work and speak for the reformation of morals in society, and for the revival of spiritual life and purity in the Church. And here at last were both the sphere and the point of vantage most eminently adapted for the fulfilment of such a mission,—the sphere, the busy, cultured city which was the commercial and intellectual centre of Italy—and the point of vantage, his unquestioned command of the chief pulpit there.

His sermons during that Lent season of 1491 struck the keynote of his few years' pulpit sovereignty. In bold, thrilling tones he launched forth against the frivolity, gambling, and impiety of the citizens, the pagan tastes and learned trifling of the devotees of the ancient philosophy, the vices and tyranny of those in power, the slavish subjection of the masses, and the bad lives of the clergy. He threw scorn on the light supplied by the pagan literature so extravagantly praised, and declared that the Scriptures are the only true guide for the soul. In opposition to the prevailing tendency to depend on external works and ceremonies, he maintained that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ and the surrender of the heart to His grace. Here his teaching ran on much the same lines as those afterwards followed by Luther. It was, however, a *moral*, not a doctrinal, reform which he set himself specifically to labour for. He accepted the dogmatic beliefs of the Church, and, unlike Luther, felt no call to attack them. His one definite aim was to effect a practical purification of the Church and of the private and public life of the people.

The anxiety to hear the new preacher in the Cathedral was universal, and sometimes the excitement rose to an

extraordinary pitch. Men and women crowded round the doors in the early morning, and then thronged in and waited for hours till the preacher entered the pulpit, and held all eyes and ears intent. There he stood,—erect and easy in carriage, not tall, but well-knit and finely-strung in frame; his monk's cowl slightly drawn back over a broad forehead, deeply furrowed with wrinkles; his sallow face, with its rugged features, aquiline nose, large mouth and thick, firm lips, all lit up by dark lustrous eyes which flashed and gleamed at times with strange fascinating power. His physical endowments were by no means attractive, yet when he looked round, with his sad, wistful smile, and raised his deep-toned, resonant voice, accompanied by a simple gesture of his long and almost transparent hands, the effect was irresistible. He spoke out boldly and freely, and as he warmed with his theme his whole countenance glowed. Sometimes his accent was stern, sometimes tender and appealing; and now and again, when enlarging on the Redeemer's suffering and love, he would seize the crucifix which lay by his side and kiss it.

Yet while the crowd flocked to listen to him in the Cathedral, Savonarola was aware that his solemn predictions of woe, based, as he believed and avowed, on direct revelations of the Divine will, were exciting a large amount of contradiction. This exercised his mind severely, and led him to question whether he should not so far change his method and omit all reference to such subjects. That pause of hesitation, however, was forcibly rebuked in the way he afterwards described in his work, the *Compendium Revelationum*. "I remember that when I was preaching in the Duomo in the year 1491, after I

had composed my sermon for the second Sunday in Lent entirely on those visions, I determined to suppress it, and never in the future to touch on these matters. But God is my witness how I watched and prayed the whole of Saturday and throughout the night, but could see no other course, no other doctrine. At daybreak, weary and dejected by the long hours I had lain awake, I heard, as I prayed, a voice that said to me, 'Fool, dost thou not see that it is God's will that thou shouldst continue in the same path?' Wherefore I preached on the same day a terrible sermon."

It is evident that the strong tinge of mystical enthusiasm which had early characterised him was beginning to colour in a marked degree the entire tone of Savonarola's thinking and of his public utterances. He dreamed himself back into the days of the old Hebrew prophets, fancying himself favoured by a special illumination like theirs. The pictures of the world's future and of things unseen on which he was prone to dwell, became transformed by his brooding imagination into vivid and present realities; and they stood before his mind with such palpable clearness that he believed them to be veritable revelations from Heaven. This was a source of strength, and yet also a source of weakness. On the one hand, it sustained him in that assumption of prophetic authority which inspired his own confidence in his teaching, and made him feel that he was

> "The chosen trump wherethrough
> Our God sent forth awakening breath;"

and at the same time it mightily impressed the popular ear. On the other hand, it fostered a tendency to

extravagance and exaggeration which was fraught with many dangers, and which indeed contributed largely to the mistakes—well-meant, but none the less serious—that brought his career to a disastrous end. He had inherited some of the superstitions of mediæval piety, and this was one of them—a belief in direct visions and voices from the spiritual world. In this he was the child of the immediately preceding ages, and it was scarcely to be expected that he could be quite free from the influences which had moulded religious life and feeling for many generations down to his own.

Still the massive force of his intellect preserved Savonarola from the worst excesses to which those mystical fervours might otherwise have led. Men of culture felt as they listened to him that they were in presence of a vigorous, clear-seeing, commanding mind. His impassioned oratory enthralled them, but his mental grasp compelled their respect. They could perceive that while he denounced the exorbitant value attached to classical studies and the teachings of ancient philosophy, he was himself thoroughly versed in the very learning which he held in such slight account. His preaching was full of bold and striking ingenuities, and behind it was a wealth of knowledge and fulness of intellectual culture that could not be concealed. But the Bible was his supreme book, the sole authority on matters of belief and conduct; and he expounded it with a daring and skill rarely if ever surpassed. In every image, parable, or figure, in every historical narrative even, he found not one, but many meanings—meanings heaped upon one another with lavish profusion. He was rich in spiritual and allegorical interpretations. Here, again, Savonarola was, so far, the

child of his age, carrying with him the tendencies to intellectual subtlety and minute analysis derived from the scholastic and philosophical training under which he had been reared. Nevertheless, so intense was his moral earnestness and so great the native force of his character, that he rose conspicuously superior to the pedantry and intellectual affectations of his time. His mental activity was for ever asserting for itself a wider range. Again and again his genius burst the scholastic fetters, and struck out in freer, more natural methods of dealing with truth; and it is only just to say that by his breadth of view in discussing great vital problems, his fearless courage in facing facts and grappling with the realities of things, as well as by his thoroughgoing directness in bringing the force of reason and the teachings of Scripture to bear on the manifold questions and interests of human life, he communicated to his generation an impulse which was destined to prepare the way for the forward march of the world. He was, in fact, the pioneer of a new age—an age of fresher and larger thought, of higher aspiration and endeavour, of greater independence of intellectual and moral conviction—an age of progress, in which the pursuit of truth and the struggle for human well-being should be more than ever inspired by the passion for liberty and by a rational and practical spiritual faith. Having grown up, as he did, amid the vivid intellectual activity of the Renaissance, he infused into it, and blended with it, a force of moral energy and purpose not inherent in the Renaissance itself, which elevated its character, expanded its scope, and gave it a direction calculated to sway and shape the advance of society at large. The one serious defect of the Renaissance

was the absence of an uplifting moral ideal; and it was the merit of Savonarola that he supplied that want. He planted right at the heart of the great literary revival an ideal and a pure moral enthusiasm fitted to lead it on to higher results, and to charge it with power to stir the nobler ambitions and instincts of human nature, and urge men forward in new paths of enterprise—intellectual, social, and religious. Thus he was the precursor, not so much of the Protestant Reformation itself, as of that wider, freer movement of the human spirit out of which the Protestant Reformation and many other changes have sprung — a herald of the dawn of our modern civilisation.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Monk and the Magnifico

Notwithstanding the irritation excited in some quarters by his first Lent sermons in the Duomo, Savonarola's power and success were so undoubted that he was invited to preach before the Signory—the body of chief magistrates—in the Palazzo Vecchio, on one of the days in Easter Week. He felt himself rather embarrassed in addressing so specially select an audience, and under the necessity of being more polite in his utterances, "like Christ," as he said, "in the house of the Pharisee." Yet he contrived to speak some pointed words on the duties of rulers. He condemned the tyranny which made heavy exactions and loved flattery, and pronounced the prince to be responsible for the evil in his city.

Some of his remarks were construed into significant allusions to Lorenzo de Medici, and it was alleged that Lorenzo, on hearing of the sermon, had taken offence. It was even asserted that the displeasure felt at Court would lead to the preacher's expulsion from Florence. We find a reference to those rumours in a letter written to his warmly attached friend, Fra Domenico da Pescia, one of the San Marco brothers, who was away on a preaching mission. Calling to mind the case of a well-

known monk who had been sent into exile a few years before for his vehement testimony against usury, Savonarola said, "Many have feared, and still fear, that that will be done to me which was done to Fra Bernardino." Lorenzo, however, gave no manifest sign of disapprobation, and, whatever the leading men around him may have suggested, he declined as yet to interfere.

Meanwhile the impression of Savonarola's ability and genius was growing, and in July of that same year, 1491, he was elected by his brother-monks as the Prior of San Marco. As the convent had been rebuilt and enriched by the house of Medici, it had been the custom for the new Prior on his appointment to repair to the Medici palace and render some sort of homage to the reigning head of the family. Savonarola was expected to conform to that custom, but showed no inclination to do so. The older friars became uneasy, and, hurrying to his cell, remonstrated with him on the omission of what seemed to them an important duty. "Who named me to be Prior—God or Lorenzo?" he asked. "God," was the answer. "Then," said he, "to Him alone will I give thanks, and not to mortal man." Lorenzo, when told of this speech, merely remarked, "A stranger has taken up his abode in my house, and will not deign to pay me a visit." The Magnifico was apparently struck with the lofty independence of a man of whose exceptional gifts he was already aware, and his curiosity was awakened to know him better. Honouring every form of talent, and eager to draw all that was distinguished and remarkable within his own circle, he made many efforts to conciliate and attract the brilliant preacher. If

Savonarola would not come to him, he would go to Savonarola. He went repeatedly to San Marco, to hear Mass in the church, and afterwards walked in the convent garden. Savonarola, shut up in his cell, engaged in his studies, left him unheeded. The monks came anxiously to tell him the news, "Lorenzo is in the garden." "Has he asked for me?" was the inquiry. "No." "Then," said the Prior, turning to his desk again, "if he does not ask for me, let him go or stay as he will."

It would appear that from the first Savonarola was conscious of a fundamental antagonism between himself and the illustrious Prince at the head of the State. He cannot have failed to recognise the uncommon skill and resourceful ability of Lorenzo; yet it is not quite clear that he had an adequate comprehension of Lorenzo's large and varied power, his splendid intellectual capacity, the elements of real genius which had won for him his wide and brilliant renown. Though studiously avoiding any direct exhibition of hostility, nevertheless, there is reason to believe, he regarded Lorenzo as a type of that repressive despotism against which his whole soul was in revolt; and also as an embodiment of that bewitching but morally pernicious pagan spirit which all the purest instincts of his nature impelled him to combat and arrest. Hence the rigid austerity of his demeanour in rejecting the courtesies of one whom he regarded as the corrupter of the people's morals and the destroyer of their freedom. Whether he might not ultimately have gained an influence for good over Lorenzo's mind by a manner more gracious, is open to question. But feeling constrained to set himself against the entire

system of things identified with what he believed to be Lorenzo's unjust and demoralising rule, he was resolved to keep clear of any embarrassments arising from the great man's patronage or friendship. Lorenzo, on his part, was not readily discouraged in his conciliatory advances. He sent rich presents to the convent, and on one occasion dropped a number of gold pieces into the alms-box. When the box was opened, the Prior, convinced that they had been placed there by Lorenzo, laid them aside, and sent them to the Guild of the Good Men of San Martino, to be distributed among the poor, saying, as he did so, "The silver and copper are enough for us." He was not going to allow himself to be compromised in his work for God by any seduction of bribes and gifts; for, as he remarked in his sermon a few days later, a faithful dog does not cease barking in his master's defence because a bone has been thrown to him.

Baffled once more, Lorenzo began to take alarm. He had hitherto shown a wonderful patience and magnanimity, but at last he realised the indomitable temper of the preacher, whose influence threatened his prestige and power. The step he next took to win him into complaisance was to send a deputation of five influential citizens—Domenico Bonsi, Guid' Antonio Vespucci, Paolo Soderini, Francesco Valori, and Bernardo Rucellai—on a special visit to San Marco. They came as if by their own prompting, to urge Savonarola to moderate his tone and take up a less severe attitude in denouncing abuses; and they dropped ominous hints as to the risk of banishment if he should continue his sweeping charges against the

existing order of affairs in the city. The composed and resolute bearing with which Savonarola met the deputation rather disconcerted them in delivering their message. For a message it was, as he at once divined. They were acting at the bidding of another, he plainly told them, and not of their own accord; it was Lorenzo who had sent them, and Lorenzo should be enjoined to repent of his sins, "for the Lord spares no one, and fears not the princes of the earth." And as for the threat of banishment, he said, "I fear not sentences of banishment; for this city of yours is but a grain of lentil in the earth. Nevertheless, though I am a stranger, and Lorenzo a citizen and the first in the city, I shall stay where I am, and it is he that will depart." Savonarola was deeply moved by this visit and its evident design to terrorise him into the suppression of his convictions; it confirmed him in his determination to maintain his independence at whatever cost. He had a strong assurance that the condition of Florence and Italy was about to undergo a change, and he went so far as to predict, in the presence of many witnesses, that the Magnifico himself, the Pope, and the King of Naples were all soon to come to their end.

Lorenzo, mortified by the unmistakable repulse he had received, now resolved to use more decided measures for the subversion of an influence which, he felt, there was serious reason to fear. Fra Mariano da Gennazzano, the polished rhetorician, by whose popularity Savonarola's first pulpit efforts were eclipsed, had for some time retired into comparative silence. From the seclusion of the convent of San Gallo, which Lorenzo had built for him, he was called by the

Magnifico to resume his preaching and to confute the prophetic pretensions of the rival who had supplanted him in the Florentine mind. He appeared in the pulpit of San Gallo, and discoursed on the text, "It is not given to you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." The audience was large and eagerly expectant. Lorenzo was present, along with a numerous company of his literary friends and many of the magnates of the city. But, for the object intended, the result was a failure. Fra Mariano, by his heat of temper and excessive coarseness of vituperation, overshot the mark. His admirers were shocked, and some of them openly turned and became followers of Savonarola, while to Lorenzo himself the sermon was altogether disappointing, and henceforth he left the Prior of San Marco undisturbed.

Savonarola replied on the following Sunday to Mariano's attack, preaching on the same text, and defending himself with vigour against the charges of extravagance and presumption levelled at him in Mariano's discourse. Ere long, however, some sort of reconciliation was effected between the two preachers, and at the invitation of Mariano they joined in celebrating Mass together in the church of San Gallo. Mariano soon after received an appointment at Rome, where at a later date, as we shall find, he again made himself conspicuous by ill-designed efforts to malign and injure his old rival when beset by gathering troubles, and with darkness and with dangers compassed round.

Savonarola's supremacy in the pulpit of Florence was now undisputed. Lorenzo, despite the defeat of his attempts to win over or to subdue him, displayed

a large measure of tolerance, and allowed him to strengthen his hold on the popular regard. In a few months, however, the distinguished Prince was struck down by a disease which baffled human skill. It was in the spring of 1492, and Lorenzo the Magnificent, as yet only forty-four years of age, in the prime of life and the height of his power, lay in his beautiful villa at Careggi, among the olive-gardens, pronounced by the doctors to be near his end. Then Savonarola was surprised by a summons to attend the deathbed of the great man. Lorenzo had sent for him, because, according to one account, he wished to die in charity with all men; or because, according to another account, he was racked by remorse for past misdeeds, and although Holy Communion had been administered by one of the priests, he yet desired absolution at the hands of one whom he declared to be the only honest "religious" whom he knew, and who acted up to his profession. Savonarola duly appeared. The friar and the Magnifico had never met before. What happened at the interview it is difficult precisely to ascertain. In the version of the story given by Pico della Mirandola, nephew of the versatile scholar of the same name, and also by Burlamacchi, it is stated that when Savonarola came into the dying man's presence, Lorenzo mentioned that he had three special sins to confess—the sack of Volterra, the plunder of the Monte delle Fanciulle (an institution founded for the dowry of Florentine maidens who had been deprived of their marriage portions), and the slaughter of Florentine citizens after the Pazzi conspiracy. Savonarola consoled him during these confessions by repeating, "God is merciful; God is merciful;" and

then, when Lorenzo had finished, he demanded of him three things before absolution could be given. First, that he should have a living faith in God's mercy. Lorenzo replied that he had such a faith. Second, that he should restore what he had unjustly acquired, and charge his sons to make restitution. Lorenzo, after hesitating a moment, signified his assent. Then came the third stipulation. Savonarola drew himself up to his full height, and said, "Give Florence back her liberties." Lorenzo turned his face to the wall and uttered not a word, and Savonarola left the room without granting the absolution desired.

There is considerable ground to suspect that in describing this interview the biographers of Savonarola, writing some years after his death, may have been moved by their enthusiastic admiration for their hero to give an exaggerated colouring to the actual facts. It is hardly to be supposed that one in the position and with the character of Savonarola would violate the oath of secrecy with regard to a deathbed confession. It is indeed doubtful whether Lorenzo, in sending for him, had in view any such confession at all. He had already confessed to the priest who administered to him the Holy Communion, and there are difficulties in the way of supposing that he wished to make another confession. The account given by Poliziano, Lorenzo's favourite Court-companion, is less dramatic, but in many respects more probable. It was written in a letter only a few weeks after the event. According to Poliziano, Savonarola came not to hear a confession, but to address some friendly counsels to the dying man. He admonished him to hold firmly to the faith, which Lorenzo avowed that

he did. He exhorted him to amend his life if he should recover, and that he promised diligently to do. Finally, he urged him to meet death, if it came, with resignation, and the reply was, "Nothing would please me better, should it be God's will." Savonarola then prepared to depart. "Give me your blessing, father, before you go," Lorenzo asked; whereupon Savonarola recited the prayers for the dying, in which Lorenzo with bowed head and pious responses earnestly joined. This description of the occurrence, which is simple and natural, presents Savonarola in a less harsh and irreconcilable aspect than the other; at the same time it brings into view, with an air of truthfulness, some of the better qualities which still undoubtedly lingered in Lorenzo's strangely complex and richly endowed nature.

So the two notable men met and parted. The monk went away to his convent and to his work in the pulpit, which was every month widening before him; the Magnifico rapidly sank, and died on the 8th of April 1492, "leaving, as such men do, the deluge after him."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Changes and Prophecies of Change

On the death of Lorenzo de Medici his son Piero came into power. He was gallant and comely in person, a keen athlete, delighting in riding, wrestling, tennis, and other exercises of physical skill; yet, though possessed of considerable mental ability, the new ruler of Florence lacked the qualities essential to the wise management of men. He had all the ambition which characterised Cosimo and Lorenzo, but was entirely destitute of the tact and statesmanlike shrewdness which had lifted them to success, while his rudeness of manner, haughty spirit, and violent outbursts of temper were a constant cause of offence. Under his leadership Florence soon lost its proud pre-eminence and its balancing influence in Italian affairs. In the government of the city itself his failure was equally marked. Lorenzo had been scrupulously careful to preserve the form and semblance of liberty, even though depriving the people of its reality; Piero had no patience with such a policy, and even the form of liberty he rashly proceeded to destroy. Instead of flattering the popular mind by keeping up the appearance of being the first citizen of the State, and therefore one with the Florentines themselves, as his father and Cosimo had done,

he determined to play the rôle of absolute prince, and to brook no restraint in the use of his power. A widespread disaffection was thus created. Many leading men, who had willingly followed Lorenzo, now fell away from his son, and a party continually increasing in numbers and strength was formed against him.

Meanwhile the voice of Savonarola was still pleading for righteousness, purity, and the fear of God, and more and more the discontented class in the city gathered round his pulpit. He displayed no special antagonism to Piero's rule; nevertheless, without his intending it, probably without his being conscious of it, he came to be regarded, if not as the head, yet as the heart of the disaffection, since the principles which he proclaimed with passionate earnestness were so clearly in favour of justice and liberty. That Savonarola was himself profoundly stirred by the prevailing feeling of unrest, may be seen from the strange visions which at this time flashed before his mind. On Good Friday, a fortnight after Lorenzo's death, he beheld, as he afterwards described, a black cross, which rose from the midst of the city of Rome and reached the sky, bearing on it the inscription, *Crux Irae Dei* (the Cross of God's Wrath); and on its appearance the clouds gathered, the sky darkened, lightning and thunder, wind and hail burst forth in fury, and multitudes of men were slain. Then the scene changed; the sky cleared, and from the midst, not of Rome, but Jerusalem, he saw another cross, so brilliant and glorious that all the world was illumined by it, and flowers sprang up, and joy awoke on every hand. It bore the legend, *Crux*

*Misericordiæ Dei* (the Cross of God's Mercy), and all the nations flocked to adore it. Such a vision indicated the suspense, and the expectation of an impending crisis, which Savonarola shared with the general mind.

The first change which broke the suspense was the death of the Pope, the lax and incompetent Innocent VIII. Here was a second instance of the fulfilment of those prophecies reported to have been uttered by Savonarola in the sacristy of San Marco in the previous year. First Lorenzo, and then the Pope, whom he had declared to be near their end, were now gone.

All Italy was eagerly intent on the election of Innocent's successor. During the night between the 10th and 11th of August 1492, the Conclave of Cardinals, assembled at the Vatican, chose the notorious Roderigo Borgia, a Spaniard by birth, to fill the vacant chair. The result was due to the rankest bribery. Vast sums of gold were freely used in Borgia's favour, and some of the cardinals received a heavy price for their vote. Borgia's character was flagrantly impure. While fascinating in address, genial in disposition, and singularly expert in the conduct of affairs, he was a prelate whose life was immoral and licentious to a deplorable degree, and whose breaches of the vow of chastity were distinctly and widely known. In the appointment of such a man to the highest dignity in the Church, and in the general gratification with which his election was hailed throughout the land, we have a striking evidence of the laxity of moral feeling which formed a marked feature of the times. Dissolute and corrupt as the

Papal Court had been before, under Sixtus IV. and Innocent VIII., it now became more than ever a centre of demoralisation; and when the new Pope was proclaimed under the title of Alexander VI., all hope for the regeneration of religion and of the Church seemed to be shattered. For a while at first appearances promised a strong and determined rule, but events gradually proved that it was to be strong and determined not in the interests of religion, but only in the interests of the Pope himself, and of his rapacious, violent, and unscrupulous family.

To Savonarola in Florence, with eye ever fixed on the movements of the ecclesiastical world, the elevation to the pontificate of a prelate of Alexander VI.'s powerful yet darkly blemished character was a painful disappointment; and when he thought of the bribery and intrigue by which that elevation had been secured, and saw after a time how affairs were tending, his mind was filled with the gloomiest forebodings. He looked for nothing but woe and disaster. The sombre picture which his imagination drew of the immediate future was so definite and real, that he accepted it as a revelation from heaven. He saw it all as an inspired vision. On the night preceding the last of his Advent sermons in 1492, he beheld in the heavens a hand grasping a sword, on which were inscribed the words, *Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter* (the Sword of the Lord upon the earth soon and speedily). He heard voices pledging grace to the penitent, threatening stripes and vengeance on the wicked, and calling upon himself to urge men to reverence the Almighty, and also to pray that God

should send good shepherds to His Church, that the flock might be fed and saved.

That Savonarola believed in these visions as veritable communications from the unseen, it is impossible to doubt. His mind conceived things with such vivid intensity, that his thoughts assumed a concrete shape and colour which imparted to them an authority in his view nothing less than Divine. He placed the same measure of reliance on his prophecies and predictions of the future. These were, probably, but the sagacious forecasts which his skilful reading of events had led him to form, yet in a high-strung temperament like his, they were converted into divinely-sent glimpses into the secrets of Providence, which he was commissioned to make known to men. There is no sound reason for charging him as a mere pretender to the gifts of the prophet and the seer, for the sake of sensational impressiveness and popular effect. His sincerity of spirit was sufficiently proved to clear his character from any suspicion of wilful deception. It is quite obvious, however, that he exaggerated both the value and the authority of his prophecies and visions. For the most part they came to him in times of social and political agitation, and therefore they were attended with a state of excitement in his own feelings which led him to place undue confidence in their Divine inspiration. The fact also that in repeated instances they approached so wonderfully near the truth, was itself a snare by which his mind was beguiled. No doubt, those visions and prophecies gave him a certain arresting power in addressing the people; they imparted an added force to the nerve-thrilling and often spirit-quickening

words which poured forth from his strong and fervent soul; still, it must be admitted, they tempted him into occasional excesses of zeal, and into misguided attitudes and utterances, which ultimately had the effect of embarrassing his reforming work and bringing about his sad and premature end.

Visions and prophecies entered largely into the substance of Savonarola's sermons in the months immediately following Alexander VI.'s accession to the Papal throne, and Florence was stirred by his ominous foreshadowings of coming judgment. Suddenly, however, in the spring of 1493, it was found that Savonarola had left the city and was preaching at Bologna. According to Villari, his departure was due to the intervention of Piero de Medici, who, through fear of the influence of the distinguished preacher round whom his own enemies were now rallying, instigated the authorities of the Dominican Order to command his removal. Dr. Creighton throws doubt on the existence of any such feeling on Piero's part, and argues that if Savonarola had been regarded as an enemy it is inconceivable that Piero should have helped him, as he afterwards did, to procure the Papal Bull which made the Florentine Dominicans independent of the Lombard Congregation. The real explanation of the absence it is not easy to discover; but the absence itself was a vexation to the Florentines, and especially trying to the monks of San Marco, who sadly missed the guidance and inspiring fellowship of their beloved Fra Girolamo. His work at Bologna was not altogether encouraging. He preached the Lenten course of sermons there, but felt as if in an atmosphere of restraint, and this so

tamed his manner as to call forth the common criticism that he was but "a simple man, and a good enough preacher for women." Gradually, however, his audience increased, and people of all ranks—artisans, peasants, burghers, men and women of note — were attracted by the reputation of his name. The haughty wife of Giovanni Bentivoglio, the despotic lord of Bologna, was one of his regular hearers, but she came habitually late, and with a pompous train of attendants, interrupting the devotions of the congregation and the discourse of the preacher. At first Savonarola endeavoured to shame her by pausing in his sermon till she and her retinue were settled in their seats, but finding that the annoyance was repeated, he addressed an admonition to ladies in general as to the duty of arriving in time and not disturbing the worship. Even this had no effect; and at last, one day, when the interruption was particularly distracting, Savonarola was roused, and cried out, "Behold, here comes the devil to disturb the word of God." In her rage at such a public affront to her pride, the great lady ordered two of her cavaliers to strike her reprover dead there and then in the pulpit. They had not the courage to attempt the task. She sent two others to attack him in the convent of San Domenico, but when admitted into his presence they were subdued by his gentle yet dignified bearing, and crept away abashed. Notwithstanding this patent risk to his life, he remained in the city till the Lent season closed, and then in his last sermon he made the public announcement, evidently in defiance of the hostile design to which he knew himself exposed: "This afternoon I will take the road to Florence, with my

slender staff and my wooden flask, and I will repose at Pianora. If any person want aught of me, let him come before I set out;" and then he added, with significant emphasis, "Nevertheless, it is not my fate to die at Bologna."

# CHAPTER IX

## Preparing for the Flood

The first task to which Savonarola set himself on returning from Bologna was the reform of his own monastery. This was an object which he had been contemplating for some time, as a preparation for any wider reform to which Providence might open the way. He saw clearly that if a thorough improvement in the religious condition of the Church was to be reached, the work must begin amongst the monks and the priests, and he decided therefore to make a start by setting his own household in order.

As an initial step, however, he found it necessary to procure for himself and his convent a more independent position. San Marco and the other Dominican brotherhoods associated with it in Tuscany were under the jurisdiction of the Congregation of Lombardy, and Savonarola, as Prior of San Marco, was subject to the commands of the Vicar of that Congregation. Accordingly, with a view to obtain greater freedom in his reforming efforts, he made application to Rome for the separation of the Tuscan Congregation from that of Lombardy; and in this he was supported not only by his own brethren, but by the Signory of

Florence and by Piero de Medici himself. The influential Cardinal Caraffa of Naples was also on his side. The chief opponents of the scheme were the heads of the Lombard convents, Ludovico Sforza of Milan, and Pope Alexander VI. Piero de Medici's assistance may be explained partly by a desire to show hostility to Ludovico Sforza, and partly by his expectation that the independence of the Tuscan monasteries, and especially of San Marco, would add to the dignity of Florence. In face of the Pope's disfavour the case seemed hopeless, but a Brief ordaining the separation was obtained by a bold and clever manœuvre. The subject was discussed at a Consistory held at Rome on 22nd May 1493, when Alexander, losing patience, abruptly closed the assembly, declaring that he would sign no Brief that day. Cardinal Caraffa remained behind, and in playful conversation with the Pope drew the signet-ring from his finger, sealed the document, which had been already prepared, with the full stamp of Papal authority, and then carried it off in triumph, just a few minutes before a deputation representing the opposing party arrived to find that the deed against which they wished to protest had been done, and could not be recalled. The effect of this Brief was to give to Savonarola a liberty of action which he had not hitherto possessed. He was re-elected Prior of San Marco, and was afterwards appointed Vicar-General of the Tuscan Congregation, becoming thereby independent of all ecclesiastical authority save that of the Pope and the Father-General of the Dominican Order.

The free position thus gained, Savonarola at once proceeded to use in the reform of San Marco. His

first work was to restore the original rule of the founder. San Domenico's last words to his disciples had been, "Have charity, preserve humility, observe voluntary poverty; may my malediction and that of God fall upon him that shall bring possessions to this order." The possessions which the convent had acquired, in disregard of those injunctions, were now renounced. All fine clothing, ornaments, and expensive furniture were forbidden. Longer hours of prayer, fasting, and penitential mortification were introduced, Savonarola himself being as rigorous as any in the practice of these austerities. The two cells which he occupied at the end of the long corridor on the upper floor were barely furnished, and very small, each being only four paces square, with one window about two feet in height and rounded at the top. One was his sleeping apartment, the other his study. In the first cell the visitor sees to-day some of the relics of the great Prior's devoutly simple and self-denying life—his rosary, wooden crucifix, cloak, under-garment, and hair-shirt; and also a reminder of his pathetic end—a fragment of the stake at which he suffered.

Moreover, it was arranged that if the alms collected from friends outside were not sufficient, the needs of the brotherhood were to be met by the manual labour of those whose tastes and abilities did not qualify them for intellectual studies or peculiarly spiritual work. The result of this arrangement was that San Marco became a home of artistic industry, where painting, sculpture, architecture, wood-carving, and manuscript-illumination were busily pursued. As for the special studies carried on, these were divided into three

branches—dogmatic theology, philosophy and moral science, and Holy Scripture; and in order that the work of the last-named department might be followed out to greater profit, Savonarola took care to provide for the teaching not only of Greek, but of the Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldee tongues.

The prestige of San Marco was distinctly enhanced under so lofty-purposed and large-minded a régime. Difficulties, indeed, arose; criticism and hostility had to be encountered; but soon a higher earnestness was awakened, and the impression produced in Florence was such as to attract ever-increasing numbers of citizens, some of them men of noble birth, to join the brotherhood. The convent became the centre of a revived religious enthusiasm, and the fresh, purifying influence was felt in other communities of the Dominican Order throughout Tuscany.

Savonarola's relations with his own monks and with the visitors who frequented the convent were of the most cordial and friendly character. The natural gravity of his disposition was softened by a gentle graciousness, which seldom failed to beget a warm affection in those closely associated with him. He could unbend from his usual austerity of mien, and enter with genial freedom into the pleasantries and pastimes of the brethren in their hours of relaxation. Occasionally he would take them out for a day's excursion into the country, choosing some secluded spot where they could enjoy the beauties of nature undisturbed; and there he would freely join with them in their simple repast under a shady tree, read to them, sing with them, and look on with frank and easy good-humour at the sports in which the novices

sought vent for their youthful spirits and energies; endearing himself to them all by his winning brotherliness and humanity.

He was, moreover, the trusted counsellor to whom citizens of all ranks turned for guidance in their perplexities. Inquirers came to him with their doubts; care-laden men and women sought his consolation in their troubles; the erring and penitent repaired to him with the burdens that lay upon their conscience; and he received them, one and all, with a sweet benignity and a firm yet gentle faithfulness of treatment which sent them away strengthened and comforted. He had a tender heart, with a deep fountain of sympathy in it, notwithstanding his apparent severity.

His usefulness at this time was extended in its range by the devotional publications which he had begun to issue. His tractates on Humility, Prayer, the Love of Jesus Christ, and the Widowed Life were widely used as religious handbooks, and enabled him to reach and influence a larger audience than that which had been enthralled by his ministrations in the Cathedral. These works had a fine saintly flavour, a mystic elevation of thought, and a rich spiritual wisdom, which afforded nourishment to thousands of earnest, aspiring minds not only in Florence but in far distant cities.

For months now Savonarola's voice had not been heard in public, but towards the end of this year, 1493, he appeared again in the Duomo pulpit, and preached the sermons for the Advent season to congregations that listened with rapt and reverent emotion. His strong personality and impassioned earnestness, his lofty integrity and purity of life, against which the

slightest whisper of suspicion had never been breathed, were steadily raising him in the esteem of the community, while the growing belief in his predictions and warnings intensified the popular interest in his preaching. With the 73rd Psalm for his subject, he dwelt specially on the corruptions of the clergy and the vices of the princes of Italy. The clergy, he said, "tickle men's ears with talk of Aristotle and Plato, Virgil and Petrarch, and take no concern in the salvation of souls. . . . They speak against pride and ambition, yet are plunged in both up to the eyes; they preach chastity, and maintain concubines; they prescribe fasting, and feast splendidly themselves."

He had strong words of reproof for the dignitaries of the Church, and in a classical passage, which is here quoted from the English translation of Professor Villari's work, he held them up to withering scorn. "There thou seest the great prelates with splendid mitres of gold and precious stones on their heads, and silver crosiers in hand; there they stand at the altar, decked with fine copes and stoles of brocade, chanting those beautiful vespers and masses, very slowly, and with so many grand ceremonies, so many organs and choristers, that thou art struck with amazement. . . . Men feed upon these vanities and rejoice in these pomps, and say that the Church of Christ was never so flourishing, nor divine worship so well conducted as at present . . . likewise that the first prelates were inferior to these of our own times. The former, it is true, had fewer gold mitres and fewer chalices, for, indeed, what few they possessed were broken up to relieve the needs of the poor; whereas our prelates for the sake of obtaining chalices, will rob the poor of

their sole means of support. But dost thou know what I would tell thee? In the primitive Church the chalices were of wood, the prelates of gold; in these days the Church hath chalices of gold and prelates of wood."

Equally severe were the rebukes which he levelled at the political rulers of the land, the petty but ostentatious sovereigns who held sway over the numerous principalities into which Italy was then divided. They made their courts and palaces a refuge for the wanton and the unworthy. They showed favour to flattering philosophers and poets, who pandered to their vanity by lies and fables. And he struck a note of passionate sympathy with liberty by denouncing those luxurious princes for the readiness with which, under the influence of false counsellors, they devised new burdens and taxes to drain the blood of the people. The righteous, he said, were longing for the scourge of God to smite the earth, and in solemn accents he foretold a day that was drawing nigh when, hurrying down from the hills of the north, the agent of God's retribution would appear. "Over the Alps One is coming, sword in hand, against Italy, to chastise her tyrants. His coming will be in the storm and whirlwind, like that of Cyrus."

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the preaching of Savonarola was altogether in this severely denunciatory strain. Now and again his voice softened, and in tones of tenderness which went straight to the heart he spoke of his anxiety for his beloved Florence, of his sorrow for the sins of her people, his yearnings for their salvation, his fears and hopes regarding their future; and as he thus poured

out his soul in fond concern and entreaty, the tears rolled down many a cheek, and even strong and hardened men were overcome. As Mary Tudor said of Calais, so might Savonarola have said of Florence, "If my heart were cut open, you would see the name engraved there." Florence and her interests were dear to his affections, never absent from his thought, and somehow in those earlier years of his ministry he made the citizens feel that it was so.

It must, however, be acknowledged that, owing partly to his natural sombreness of temperament, and partly to his painful realisation of the evil conditions of his time, the great preacher contracted a style of discourse which was marked by severity of reproof and denunciation as its predominant feature. Hence there is considerable truth in Roscoe's description: "The Divine word from the lips of Savonarola descended not amongst his audience like the dews of heaven; it was the piercing hail, the sweeping whirlwind, the destroying sword."

The Lent of the following year, 1494, is rendered memorable by the famous series of lectures on the Book of Genesis, which had been begun in 1492. Having proceeded in his exposition as far as the building of the Ark by Noah, he lingered over that subject, and day after day gave full range to his ingenuity in allegorical interpretation, astonishing his hearers by the wealth of spiritual instruction which he drew from every minute detail. The Ark was the shelter of the righteous from the storm of judgment; its length signified faith; its breadth, charity; its height, hope. Every plank had its mystic meaning, and so many new thoughts offered themselves day by

day, that it seemed as if he never could reach the story of the Flood itself. Still there rang through all the same message of warning, the same urgent appeal to repent and seek deliverance from the tribulation at hand. That message and warning were listened to with more living interest now. The public conscience was gradually awakening. The burning words of the eloquent preacher were reaching Florentine hearts as well as captivating Florentine ears. A religious revival had begun. The abuses and iniquities of Church and State were coming home to men with a force unfelt before. The misdoings of a Pope like Alexander VI. and the mismanagement of the city's affairs by Piero de Medici were creating a vague uneasiness and haunting fear. There was a presentiment of trouble on every side. Those sermons on the Ark, therefore, offering a refuge from the threatened calamities, and promising safety to Florence, the favoured city, if she should repent and turn to the Lord, met a conscious need in people's minds. But the Flood had not yet come.

# CHAPTER X

## Amid the Throes of Revolution

All through the summer of 1494 signs of storm and trouble loomed on the northern horizon. The young monarch, Charles VIII. of France, as representing the house of Anjou, was preparing to assert an old claim to the kingdom of Naples, where Alfonso II. had just recently succeeded to the throne. Pope Alexander VI., after appearing for a time to encourage Charles, had turned round and taken Alfonso's side in defence of his rights. But the most determined agent in fomenting the strife was Ludovico Sforza, the usurper of Milan, who had strong personal reasons for instigating Charles in prosecuting his design. Ludovico held his nephew, the rightful heir to the dukedom, in close confinement, and lived in terror of the vengeance threatened by the Neapolitan reigning family, to which the wife of the imprisoned Prince belonged. It was therefore to his interest that the southern kingdom should be seized by the foreigner. Another adviser in the same direction was the powerful cardinal, Giuliano della Rovere, who had been a candidate for the Papal chair, and who still bitterly resented the election of Pope Alexander in preference to himself by means of the lavish bribery employed. Rovere had

deserted to the French King, and was now using his influence to urge him to strike a blow at Naples and Rome together.

The land was in a ferment of restlessness as the summer wore on. Ambassadors hurried hither and thither; intrigues were busy at Milan and Rome and at the French King's court; rumours of all sorts flew abroad. The people everywhere were on the strain of expectancy. Many were ready to welcome the invader in the hope that his coming might be the means of redressing their grievances and righting their wrongs. There was a widespread feeling, so far strengthened by Savonarola's preaching, that some momentous change was at hand. The Prior of San Marco had foretold that the instrument of God's judgment would come from beyond the Alps, to purge the nation from its evil and renovate the Church; here now, it seemed, in the monarch of France was the divinely-appointed messenger through whom the prediction was to be fulfilled.

At Florence public sympathy, affected largely by the memory of a long-standing friendship, was at first distinctly in favour of France. Piero de Medici, however, regardless of popular sentiment, and without consulting the Signory, took the rash step of openly joining the alliance between Naples and the Pope. The Florentines were exasperated; Charles VIII. was roused to wrath, not only against Piero but against Florence itself; and Ludovico Sforza, dreading the effect of so formidable a league on his own tenure of power, became more pressing than ever in inciting the French monarch to move southwards and march his armies over the land.

The counsellors and generals of Charles had nothing but discouragement to offer to such an enterprise, which in their estimation was hazardous in the extreme; but the King overruled all objections. He was consumed by a feverish ambition, and buoyed up by romantic dreams of adventure and conquest. He had conceived the idea of possessing the whole of Italy, of rising to imperial dignity, and making the Papacy dependent on France; and then, having gained a position at the head of Europe, he was to set forth on a holy crusade against the conquering Turks. With such visions of achievement kindling his imagination, he resolved to plunge into the undertaking, which looked so rich in gain and glory.

In the beginning of September Charles crossed the Alps, and it was amid the tension of suspense created by the news of that event that Savonarola resumed the sermons on Noah's Ark which he had found himself so strangely unable to bring to a close in the previous spring. On 21st September he came to the passage, "Behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth." Tidings had just reached Florence of the sack and pillage of Rapallo, on the northern coast, by a section of the French army, and a feeling of consternation had been aroused. The popular sympathy with the invaders was now changed into an agitation of dismay as it began to be realised how grave a disaster the invasion was likely to prove. The Cathedral was crowded to its utmost capacity, by a congregation sensitively alive to every word which the Fra Girolamo had to say. With tremulous eagerness they waited for the great preacher, and when at last he mounted the pulpit and gave forth the text with a voice that

sounded like thunder in the vast gloomy building, the words seemed to come as a supernatural announcement, miraculous in its very appropriateness. The hushed assembly, which embraced not only the chief merchants but many of the scholars and cultivated men of the city, listened awestruck under a deepening impression of the clearness and certainty with which the preacher's predictions were coming true. Savonarola himself, as all could see, was profoundly moved, and as he proclaimed judgment against ungodliness, and implored his beloved Florence to repent and obtain deliverance from the Lord, he spoke as one overpowered by the sense of his own inspiration from on high. In speechless awe, and half dead with terror, the great audience, after the sermon, passed out into the street.

Slowly but steadily the flood of invasion swept southward and advanced towards Florence, the dissensions and jealousies of the Italian States leaving its course comparatively unchecked. Piero de Medici, recognising his danger, and conscious of the utter want of support from his own people, took his fate in his hand and hurried off alone to conciliate Charles and make terms of peace. So chilling, however, was his reception, that his weak spirit succumbed, and he consented to conditions which were humiliating in the lowest degree. He surrendered to Charles the border fortresses of the Florentine territory, granted to him the right to occupy Pisa and Leghorn during the continuance of the war, and promised to pay a subsidy of 200,000 florins, without obtaining in return for such concessions any guarantee whatever either for his city or for himself.

Florence rose in fury. Its independence had been

sold away by the arrogant Prince whose control of affairs was utterly regardless of the public good; and the long-pent-up discontent found expression in a burst of revolutionary excitement. Savonarola rendered an important service by doing his utmost to hold that excitement under some rational restraint. He had now the general confidence of the citizens; they knew him as an enemy of tyrants and an advocate of popular rights, and they looked to him as the one man sure to give them sympathy and guidance in this crisis of their fate. He had begun to preach on the Book of Haggai as affording a subject suited to the circumstances of the hour, and a dense mass packed the Cathedral to hear him. The burden of his message day after day, as he confronted the sea of upturned, agitated faces, was, "Repent; the salvation of Florence, of Rome, of Italy, is to come through repentance." With tender appeals and many a pathetic avowal of his tears and prayers for Florence, he exhorted the people to righteousness and faith and the fear of God. So strenuous indeed were his exertions, that he was reduced to exhaustion and his health was seriously affected for several days. But the public excitement was materially allayed, and prevented from rushing to wild and hazardous extremes.

Meanwhile the officials of the city were addressing themselves to the practical political problem which had arisen. On 4th November, the Signory, acting on their own initiative, summoned a special meeting of Council, at which Piero Capponi, a man of proved sagacity and high repute, gave voice to the general feeling. Piero de Medici, he declared, was no longer fit to govern the State, and the time had come to have

done with the government of children and to put forth an effort for the recovery of liberty. On Capponi's motion, it was resolved to send ambassadors to treat with Charles, and undo, if possible, the mischievous results of Piero's pusillanimous conduct. Those ambassadors were to offer a friendly welcome to the King and his army on their march to the south. It was also resolved to collect the soldiers in secret places in the city, and to call upon all classes to provide themselves with arms and be ready to issue forth and fight in case of need. And particularly Capponi urged, and the proposal met with hearty agreement, that Fra Girolamo Savonarola should be sent as one of the ambassadors, seeing that he had gained the love of all the people.

Fra Girolamo accepted the commission. In doing so he stepped into the arena of politics and took part in the first stages of a political revolution. True, he was a member of a monastic order, and as such supposed to be precluded from entangling himself with public earthly affairs. But the circumstances of the time and the force of his own large, strong nature had already lifted him into a position which he could not so faithfully use for the glory of God and the cause of righteousness if trammelled by rigid monastic rules. By means of those sermons delivered from the Cathedral pulpit, as well as by the power of a pure and lofty example, the distinguished preacher had by this time wrought a marked effect on the Florentine people. He had welded them into a living unity of feeling such as had not for long been seen; he had imbued large masses of them with exalted aims and with a spirit of sacred fervour and religious faith; he had reawakened their sense of justice and their love of liberty, and

given them a new conception of what a Christian city and commonwealth should be. There was no man who stood out so prominently as the representative of their best aspirations; no man so thoroughly trusted alike for his courageous integrity, his warm humanity, and his unwearied interest in the public good. Even men of culture, to whom the lofty tone of his teaching had been at first distasteful, had come to feel the contagion of his spiritual enthusiasm, and yielded to his power. Angelo Poliziano, whom we have seen as the learned scholar and the trusted friend of Lorenzo de Medici, was softened in spirit and drawn into strong sympathy with Christian truth, and when he died, in September of that very year, he requested to be buried in the Dominican habit in the San Marco church. The versatile and brilliant Pico della Mirandola, who had all along been sensitive to Savonarola's moral and intellectual power, was so deeply touched, that he cherished the desire of joining the San Marco brotherhood. These are only isolated instances of the sway which Savonarola had gained over many of the most enlightened minds of the community.

Moreover, there can be little doubt that with a considerable section of the populace the ardent confidence placed in him as a leader was immensely enhanced by his strong assertion of supernatural claims, by his ecstatic and symbolic visions, and also by that air of certitude in announcing the designs of the Almighty in passing affairs which often gave to his sermons, as George Eliot says, "the interest of a political bulletin."

Accordingly, in the political service now thrust upon him, and in the conspicuous share he was henceforth to

take in the public life of the city, we can see only the natural result of the peculiar influence and position which Savonarola had gradually acquired. Indeed, his discourses in the Duomo had already become political incidents, and it was inevitable that a man of such commanding personality and strong hold on the general regard should be forced to come to the front in the critical situation which had emerged. To Savonarola himself the constraint of circumstances was a call from Heaven. He saw in it a sign of the Supreme Will to which it behoved him to bow; as he said a short time afterwards, "I was in a safe haven, the life of a friar. . . . The Lord has driven my barque into the open sea. Before me on the vast ocean I see terrible tempests brewing. Behind I have lost sight of my haven; the wind drives me forward, and the Lord forbids my return."

Before setting out on his errand to Charles, Savonarola delivered one of his great sermons, imploring the citizens to be steadfast in mercy and peace. "If you would have the Lord to continue His mercy towards you," he ended by saying, "be you merciful towards your brethren, your friends, and even your enemies." Then, with two of his own friars as companions, he departed on foot for Pisa, where the other ambassadors had preceded him. They had had their interview with the French King before Savonarola arrived, but found that Charles would promise nothing, and postponed all negotiations until he should reach Florence in person.

Piero de Medici, who was still with the King, took alarm when the ambassadors appeared. Their coming on an independent mission from the city was to him

an evidence that some change of serious moment had occurred. He hastened back to Florence, determined to assert his ascendancy, only to discover, as it proved, that the Signory were prepared to resist his reassumption of power. He entered the city on the evening of 8th November, and when, on the following day, he presented himself with his retinue at the magisterial palace, he was treated as the betrayer of the State, and after a scene of heated recrimination, the gates were shut in his face. The great bell of the palace-tower overhead rang out the hammer-sound of alarm, and the crowd thronged into the piazza. Piero was driven to take shelter from the burst of rage which quickly rose around him. An attempt was made to rally the populace in his favour, but the once powerful Medicean watchword, *Palle, Palle* ("The Balls, The Balls"), had lost its spell, and was drowned in the loud countercries, *Popolo e Liberta! Abasso le Palle* ("The People and Liberty!" "Down with the Balls!"). And so menacing was the attitude of all classes, that Piero was obliged to seek safety in flight, first to Bologna, and afterwards to Venice, followed by a sentence of outlawry, which the Signory immediately passed.

Thus was the rule of the Medici in Florence overthrown, and a Republic established once more. It was a bloodless revolution, and comparatively free from excesses, only a few attempts being made to loot the houses of the leading Medici partisans. This singular absence of scenes of violence and licence in a crisis so intensely exciting, is ascribed by the common consent of historians to the higher moral temper which Savonarola's preaching had gradually infused into the popular mind.

Savonarola himself was still detained at Pisa on his embassy to Charles. The French King was deeply interested in the visit of this remarkable man, who had invested his own descent into Italy with all the sanctity of a mission from Heaven. Here, it seemed, was a prophet sent from the Almighty, whose message hitherto had been encouraging to France. But Charles could scarcely have been prepared for the strange address which he now received when the dark-robed, sallow-faced, lustrous-eyed monk from Florence was ushered into his presence—an address in which words of welcome were ominously mingled with utterances of admonition and warning. He told Charles that he was the Heaven-chosen instrument for the reformation of Italy, whose advent he had prophesied for the three previous years; and then he went on to say: "At length thou art come, O King, as the minister of God, the minister of justice. May thy coming prove to us altogether happy in its results. It fills with joy all servants of Christ, all lovers of justice, and all who are zealous for the life of piety. Go forward, then, glad, secure, and triumphant, since thou art sent by Him who triumphed on the cross for our salvation. But, most Christian King, give ear to my words and lay them to thy heart. The unworthy servant of God to whom those things have been revealed admonishes thee in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou must in all things incline to mercy; but most of all towards this city of Florence, which, although it labours beneath a heavy load of transgressions, contains many true servants of God, of both sexes. For their sake thou must preserve this city, that we may with more

tranquil mind pray for thee and draw down the blessing of God on this expedition. The same unworthy servant exhorts and admonishes thee to give all diligence in the defence and protection of the innocent, the widows, the orphans, and all who deserve mercy, but most of all to guard the honour of those devoted to Christ in the nunneries, lest through thee sin should more abound, and the strength vouchsafed to thee from on high be shattered. And if, O King, thou observe these things, God will increase thy temporal kingdom, grant victory to thy arms, and at last bestow upon thee the everlasting kingdom of heaven. But if thou dost forget the work for which the Lord sends thee, He will choose another in thy place and will pour upon thee His wrath. These things I tell thee in the name of the Lord."

Charles never fulfilled the sanguine expectations which Savonarola entertained regarding him. There was nothing in his character and aims to warrant such expectations. He might be the scourge of God to afflict Italy for the treacherous intrigues of its princes, for its miserable dissensions and pervading corruption, but he lacked the large nobility of purpose which might qualify him for any higher service. As an agent in restoring a righteous order in the Italian States, or in removing the abuses of the Church, he was utterly incompetent. Savonarola's hope in him was a sentimental delusion. And here we begin to see how the great friar's reliance, which was now becoming confirmed, in the Divine inspiration of his own forecasts of events, was likely to prove a snare of serious risk to himself and to his work; and it is a pathetic reflection, which keeps forcing itself upon us from this stage

onward, that the later usefulness of that lofty and splendid mind should have been marred as it was by a hallucination so devout and yet so deceptive. Savonarola believed, and believed sincerely, that he knew the intentions of the Most High with respect to the French King's invasion, and he proclaimed his belief with unfaltering authority; but it was a false confidence. The first patent indication which Charles gave of his moral unreliableness was in the cool indifference with which, on his arrival at Pisa, he allowed its inhabitants to throw off their allegiance to Florence, thus aggravating the disorders and animosities which were already too rife in the land. It would appear, however, that by his powerful and solemn address Savonarola produced for the moment a favourable impression on the French King's mind; and although he obtained no definite assurances on behalf of Florence, he returned to the city with faith still strong, and prepared to hold out some encouraging hopes.

# CHAPTER XI

## Charles VIII. in Florence

On the 17th of November King Charles entered Florence with his army, and the city was decked as for a festival in his honour. Banners waved from windows and balconies, brilliant draperies hung from roof to roof, a blaze of colour filled the streets and the piazzas through which he was to pass. Amid dense crowds that looked on with mingled wonder and fear, the glittering warrior host marched across the Ponte Vecchio, and on towards the Duomo—the artillery corps and their ponderous cannons; the Swiss mountaineers carrying their burnished halberds; the Gascon infantry with their flashing swords; the French nobles, splendidly mounted and attired in mantles embroidered with gold; the cavalry and their formidable steeds; the tall Scottish and north-country archers with their long wooden bows — a display of military power such as had not been witnessed in Florence for generations.

Attended by his bodyguard of a hundred men, and under a rich canopy, rode Charles himself on his war-horse, magnificently arrayed, with a crown on his head and lance held level in his hand, as a token that he came as a conqueror. Despite his splendour of dress

and equipage, the French monarch presented a figure unprepossessing almost to a grotesque degree. He had a large head, but puny limbs. The Venetian Ambassador Contarini described him as insignificant in appearance, with an ugly face, lustreless eyes, enormous hooked nose, thick lips which were always open, and nervous twitching hands which were never still. Such in bodily presence was the royal guest whom the Florentines welcomed with occasional, though by no means enthusiastic, shouts of *Viva Francia!* on that memorable day.

After joining with the Signory in a service at the Cathedral, Charles was conducted to the Medici palace in the Via Larga, which had been prepared for his reception, while his troops were quartered in the houses of the people. Then at night the city was illuminated, and for two days thereafter there was general mirth and feasting, though behind all the gaiety the soldiers of the Republic lurked in secret, with arms ready in case of encroachment by the foreigners on the liberties which had just recently been won.

Those liberties, it was soon seen, were imperilled not only by the insolence of the French troops, but also by the manifest disposition of the King to secure the reinstatement of Piero de Medici as a prince dependent on France. Such a design aroused universal alarm, and an assembly of the principal citizens was held to protest against it and to devise measures for its prevention. Quarrels took place daily in the streets between the French soldiers and the populace, and in one of these, which arose out of the forced release of some prisoners of war, the Swiss infantry sallied forth

in martial strength, but met with such resistance from barricades erected across their path, and from showers of stones and other missiles hurled from housetops and windows, that they were forced to beat a retreat, awed by a sense of the terrible ordeal of having to fight with almost invisible foes in such a labyrinth of narrow thoroughfares. In view of this menacing mood of feeling, Charles found himself obliged to abandon his proposal for Piero's restoration. He saw that he could no longer affect to treat Florence as a conquered city. Nevertheless the magistrates had the utmost difficulty in moderating his demands and confining them within such limits as would leave the independence of the Republic untouched. At length the issue of the negotiations turned on the settlement of those two points—the sum of money which Charles insisted on receiving, but which the Florentines deemed far too large; and the claim put forward to have a representative of France in the Florentine Assembly, whose presence and assent should be necessary to the validity of the proceedings—a claim felt to be intolerable. When the Commissioners of the Republic remonstrated, Charles broke into a rage, and ordered his *Ultimatum* to be read. The Commissioners declared it to be impossible to comply with its conditions. "Then," cried the King, with growing passion, "we will blow our trumpets." Here Capponi stepped to the front, and, snatching the paper from the secretary's hand, he tore it in pieces, exclaiming, "And we will ring our bells." Such bold language, destined to be cherished with patriotic pride in the Florentine memory, revealed to Charles the indomitable spirit with which he had to deal, and he at once drew back from his irreconcilable attitude under cover of a coarse

pleasantry on Capponi's name. It was at last agreed that the King should be recognised as the Protector of Florentine liberty, that he should be paid 120,000 florins, that Pisa and the other fortresses should be restored as soon as the war with Naples came to an end, and that the sentence of exile against Piero de Medici should be allowed to remain in force. The conditions of the treaty thus arranged were formally sworn to in the Cathedral, and then the bells were rung, bonfires were lit, and there was great rejoicing.

Still, all danger was not yet past. Charles and his army lingered in the city, giving rise to fresh suspicion, and to irritation and disorder out of which grave consequences threatened to spring. Shops were closed, business was suspended, and citizens and soldiers were constantly on the point of coming to open strife in the streets. At this distracting and hazardous juncture of affairs, it was Savonarola who solved the difficulty and saved Florence. He had been doing his utmost in the pulpit to calm the public mind during the strained and anxious days through which the city had been passing; and now, when asked to use his influence with the French King and hasten his departure, he at once responded to the call and braved the risks. Making his way to the palace, and overcoming somehow the opposition of the officials and nobles, who dreaded the effect of his visit in diminishing their chances of plunder, he gained admission to the royal presence. He told Charles that his stay was causing great injury to the city and to his own enterprise; that he was wasting time and forgetting the duty laid upon him by Providence. "Listen now," he said, "to the voice of God's servant. Go thy way

without delay, and do not bring ruin on this city, lest the anger of the Lord be roused against thee, and He choose another instrument to carry out His designs." By this prophet-like appeal he gained the result desired, and on 28th November Charles left Florence, and the citizens awoke as from a nightmare of anxiety.

Ere they departed, however, the foreigners were guilty of an act of ruthless cupidity and destructiveness. The sumptuously furnished Medici palace was ransacked of its treasures, and transformed into a wreck, by the barons, generals, and attendants of the King. They seized the many priceless specimens of the arts with which the house abounded, and which had rendered it the admiration of strangers and one of the chief ornaments of the city. Exquisite pieces of ancient sculpture, vases, cameos, and gems of various kinds, more estimable for their workmanship than for the value of their material, shared in the wholesale spoliation; and, in the words of Roscoe, "all that the assiduity and the riches of Lorenzo and his ancestors had been able to accumulate in half a century, was dissipated and demolished in a day." But the danger was removed, and the Florentines were glad. The independence of the Republic was now safe; and Savonarola's place in the affections of the people was still further confirmed by the effort he had made to accomplish that end.

# CHAPTER XII

## The Preacher as Lawgiver

No sooner were the French gone than the interest of all classes in Florence was concentrated on the work of political reconstruction which lay waiting to be done. Now that the rule of the Medici was overthrown, the government of the State had to be organised on a new basis; and here the difficulties that usually attend a revolutionary movement arose. The air was full of excitement, and in the public mind, long unaccustomed to habits of self-reliance in political action, there was no definite conception as to the form which the new constitution should take. The prevailing desire was to secure for every respectable citizen not only the right to vote in the election of his rulers, but also a chance of personally enjoying a short term of rule. This was now the Florentine ideal of liberty, but how to get it realised was far from clear.

The members of the Signory appointed under Piero de Medici had been obliged to remain in office and administer affairs until the dangers of the French occupation were past. Then they summoned a Parlamento, an assembly of the whole body of the people. The great bell tolled, and the citizens crowded into the piazza in front of the Signorial palace, to hear and

decide upon the proposals which the Signory, from the *ringhiera*, or balcony near the palace steps, had to submit. This was the ancient form of procedure, which, while it gave the appearance of a free share in the government to every citizen, was yet liable to be turned to account for selfish ends by designing politicians and by ambitious men, who by plausible arts were able to gain the ear and sway the votes of the undiscerning multitude. As yet, however, no other course suggested itself than that of advancing along the lines rendered familiar by traditional usage, and accordingly the first attempts at reconstruction were somewhat crude. The chief measure recommended to the Assembly was the appointment of a Committee of Twenty, the *Accopiatori*, as they were called; and to these it was proposed to grant the right of *Balia*, a sort of dictatorial power, with authority to elect the Signory and the other leading officials, the Accopiatori themselves to be changed every year, and the members of the Signory every two months. The people, elated by the new consciousness of independence and direct control in State affairs, passed the measure with acclamation.

In those first efforts of political reorganisation Savonarola took no active part. He was busily occupied in endeavouring to assuage the popular unrest, and in relieving the distress caused by the general suspension of business. He made special appeals in his sermons on behalf of the needy, entreating the rich to give of their abundance, and to sacrifice their pomps and luxuries, in order to meet the destitution existing around them. He urged that the shops should be reopened, work provided for the unemployed, and collec-

tions made in all the churches, declaring that, though it was the will of God that evil customs and unjust laws should be abolished, it was still imperative on men to fulfil their obvious duties. "This," he said, "is a time for words to give place to deeds. The Lord hath said, I was an hungered and ye gave Me no meat; I was naked and ye clothed Me not. He never said, Ye built Me not a beautiful church or a fine convent. The work of renovation, then, must begin with charity." Now, as ever, he strove to enforce the practical side of religion, and laboured to promote the welfare of the city by infusing the Christian spirit into its ordinary social life.

Soon, however, he was drawn once more into the full current of political activity. From the outset the newly-framed constitution would not work. Its arrangements were too vague and loosely defined; and amid the friction and discontent thereby engendered the task of remoulding the government had to be begun afresh. The serious disadvantage was that the sixty years of Medici rule had deprived the prominent men of any real experience in legislative business, and therefore there was no man competent to take the lead. A school of young political thinkers, with the subtle Machiavelli among them, was growing up; yet they were but theoretical students, who had no practical acquaintance with men or matters of State; while the conspicuous citizens who had held the magistracy were familiar only with the bare routine of official duty, and utterly unversed in the making of laws. During the discussions which arose, the Venetian form of government was repeatedly suggested as an example which it might be possible in some measure to adopt; and in

the heat of controversy over this question time was being wasted and people's minds were becoming confused.

Then came Savonarola's unique and supreme opportunity, which he felt irresistibly impelled to use. Ever alive to the movements of life and feeling around him, he had watched the commotion keenly, and pondered the problems which had to be faced. He realised the danger which hung over the city so long as its government remained unsettled, for he knew that the adherents of the old order, who had been allowed to return unmolested to their homes mainly through the forbearance which he had enjoined, were waiting and hoping for the chance of restoring the Medici to power, or of seizing the reins of government in their own hands. He knew, moreover, that the thoughts of men were turning to himself for guidance in their perplexity. Once more the force of strong character, intellectual capacity, and transparent disinterestedness was pressing the task of leadership upon the eloquent monk who had already proved a tower of strength in the exigencies of the commonwealth. Counsel, assistance, and even commands, were expected from him in the difficult task of remodelling the constitution, and it was less possible for him now than ever to stand by and be silent.

Accordingly, on the third Sunday in Advent of this same year 1494, he began to speak out on the public questions of the hour, and in doing so he assumed the authoritative tone of a lawgiver directly inspired by God. In his sermon on that day, and the other sermons that followed, he made it evident that he had studied matters of politics to some purpose, and that

he had a surprisingly clear grasp of political principles. Discussing the respective merits of monarchy and republicanism, he declared monarchy to be the best form of government when the monarch is a good man, but when the monarch is a bad man the worst form possible. "In Italy, and especially in Florence," he said, "where both strength and intellect abound, where men have sharp wits and restless spirits, the government of one could only exist as a tyranny. . . . The only government that can suit us is the government of the citizens, and one in which all have a share." He warned the Florentines against electing one man as chief to domineer over all the rest. He told them to purify their hearts, give heed to the common good, forget private interests, and assured them that if they reformed the city in this earnest temper it would become more glorious than ever yet it had been, and they should begin the reformation of all Italy, and spread their wings over the earth to reform all nations; and breaking out into prayer, he cried, "Open, O Lord, the heart of this people, that they may understand those things which are in my mind, and which Thou hast revealed and commanded."

Then he went on to avow that his sole reason for interfering with matters of State was his concern for men's salvation. He had no care for politics except as an instrument of morality. All temporal good, he insisted, must be subordinate to the moral and religious good on which it depends. "If ye have heard it said" —as it had been said by Cosimo de Medici—"that States cannot be governed by Pater Nosters, remember that this is the theory of tyrants, of men who are the enemies of God and the common weal, a theory in-

vented to oppress and not to elevate and free the city. On the contrary, if ye would have a good government, ye must submit to God. If it were not so, I should certainly not concern myself for a State that should not be subject to Him."

At last he came to the practical point, and announced his conviction that a Grand Council on the Venetian plan was the best adapted for Florence. He believed, he said, that the Venetian model would be the one chosen. But they need not be ashamed to imitate the Venetians and their constitution, "because they too received it from the Lord, from whom cometh everything that is good. Ye have seen that ever since that government has existed in Venice no divisions or dissensions of any sort have arisen in that city; and therefore we must believe that it was according to the will of God."

The views thus propounded from the Cathedral pulpit Savonarola afterwards published in his *Trattato circa il Reggimento e Governo della Città di Firenza* (Treatise respecting the Rule and Government of the City of Florence). They were views in which he was strongly supported by two men who stood out most clearly as representatives of the popular party—Antonio Soderini and Francesco Valori. Soderini, a doctor of law who had served for some years as Ambassador at Venice, had been favourably impressed by what he saw of the method of government there, and was anxious to obtain a trial for it in Florence. Valori was an old partisan of the Medici family, and had filled many posts under Lorenzo, but partly through disgust with Piero's misrule, and partly through warm religious sympathy, he had become

one of Savonarola's most devoted followers. He was a man of no great mental strength, but honest, daring, large-hearted, and an ardent friend of republican liberty. These, along with Capponi and many other men of note, were delighted to have the dim ideas floating in their minds put into definite shape and confidently championed by one so eminent. The feeling of satisfaction was shared by the general community, who were relieved to find that their admired Fra Girolamo was prepared to guide them by a clear and intelligible course out of their bewilderment. There was an opposing party, however, headed by Guid' Antonio Vespucci, a distinguished member of the legal profession, who maintained that a Grand Council after the manner of the Venetians would be too democratic an institution for such a city as Florence, whose lower classes were more numerous and restless, and also less controllable in temper, than the Venetians were. This party leaned rather to an oligarchical form of polity. But they were left with slender prospects of success after Savonarola had spoken. His powerful advocacy of the Venetian model weighed decisively in turning the scale. The leading members of the Signory consulted him at San Marco, and even asked him to meet with them at the Palazzo and preach. Then one day he invited the magistrates and all the people, excepting the women and children, to assemble in the Cathedral. He exhorted his immense audience to lay to heart the lessons of the past, and so to use their power that freedom henceforward should not be the privilege of the few for the oppression of the many, but a universal benefit. And after this introduction, he proceeded to lay down what he believed to be the

four great principles which formed the groundwork of all true government:—

(1) The fear of God and the reformation of manners; (2) zeal for popular government and the public good, above all private interests; (3) a general amnesty, whereby the friends of the past Government should be absolved from all their crimes and have their fines remitted, and indulgence be shown towards those who are indebted to the State; (4) a form of universal government which should comprehend all citizens who, according to the ancient statutes, had a right to share in public affairs.

He brought his discourse to a close by a clear and emphatic recommendation once more of a Grand Council after the manner of the Venetians, modified by such arrangements as might render it more suited to the genius and temper of the Florentine people.

This pronouncement virtually settled the question. The air of authority with which it was given forth, sustained as it was by the recollection of the marvellous vindications of the preacher's former utterances, mightily impressed the popular mind. Men of action and knowledge of the world were amazed at the large view and firm mastery displayed in dealing with a problem so tangled and complex. The result was seen in the speedy adoption of the very measures which Savonarola had proposed. On the 23rd of December a law was passed by an overwhelming majority, establishing a Great Council endowed with powers to elect the chief magistrates and control the action of the State. Eligibility to membership in this Council was restricted to the class of citizens who had reached twenty-nine years of age and had paid

taxes, and who also ranked as *beneficiati*, *i.e.* had in their own person or in the person of their immediate ancestors enjoyed the *benefit* of holding, or being proposed for, one of the higher offices. In view of such a provision, it cannot be said that the new constitution was extravagantly democratic. As it proved, the number of *beneficiati* of the required age at the time of the first election was comparatively small—only 3200 out of a population of 90,000. This body was again divided into three sections, each section fulfilling the duties of government in turn for a term of six months. In order to provide for a gradual widening of the range of political privilege, it was further enacted that every three years sixty citizens who were not *beneficiati*, and twenty young men of the age of twenty-four, should be chosen for membership in the Great Council.

There was also instituted a lesser Council of Eighty, the Ottanta, which formed a sort of senate or upper chamber, to consult with the Signory once a week, and in conjunction with the other officials to appoint ambassadors and conduct foreign and military affairs. This Council was to be renewed every six months, and its members were to be not less than forty years of age.

It was in the Signory, whose members were elected by the Great Council and changed every two months, that all new laws were first to be proposed and discussed. Then, if approved, they were to be brought before the Council of Eighty, and from there they were to be carried to the Greater Council, which alone would have authority to pronounce the final decision, the vote being taken in silence, and no one having the

right to speak except by the request of the Signory, and that only in favour of the measure submitted.

There was also instituted another small body of Ten, whose duty it was to decide on the remittance of taxes and unpaid fines imposed by the Medici Government, and to take means for a more equitable revision of the whole system of taxation. This was a question which Savonarola held to be acutely pressing, and with painstaking earnestness he strove to obtain the substitution of some more just arrangement in place of the arbitrary methods till then in force. As the result of his efforts, a new law was passed which regulated all assessments by a uniform principle, and, by levying a payment of ten per cent. on all income from real property, provided for a more impartial distribution of the public burdens. This was a reform which allayed many a grievance, and proved an untold benefit to Florence for many a day. It was, moreover, decreed that every enactment of the State, instead of being drawn out as heretofore in Latin, the language of scholars, should be written in Italian, the tongue of the people.

On another point of considerable importance Savonarola exerted his influence—the establishment of a right of appeal in the case of political offences. In the Council for dealing with such offences the ancient statute required a majority of two-thirds ere a heavy sentence could be pronounced. This was what was styled the Law of the Six Beans—the *Sei Fave*, beans being the means by which voting was conducted in Florence. Savonarola's fear was that a court so small, the members of which, moreover, were changed every few months, might be liable to impulses of party

feeling and betrayed into acts of injustice towards political opponents; and by advocating a right of appeal he endeavoured to avoid that danger. He gained his object so far. The right of appeal was formally decreed, though not precisely in the form which he desired. His proposal was that a special Council of Eighty should be chosen from the members of the Great Council, to serve as a check on the absolute authority of the Six Beans, believing that such a tribunal would be less readily swayed by factious bitterness on the one hand, or by outbursts of popular vehemence on the other. But the law, as ultimately passed, enacted that the Great Council itself was the body to which the appeal should be made.

Thus step by step the fabric of the new constitution of Florence was built up. It was a work of several months, absorbing attention and exciting lively debate among all ranks in the city; but the guiding spirit in it all was the Prior of San Marco. Every fresh measure introduced was preceded by one or more sermons from him, in which the subject was handled with a point, vigour, and practical insight into the requirements of the situation which strongly commended it to the popular intelligence. Savonarola treated the questions of life with the mind of a layman rather than that of an ecclesiastic. He had in him the spirit of the earlier monks. The monks were originally laymen pure and simple, and it was only after they had existed for centuries that they became infected with the ecclesiastical spirit, and contracted the narrow professionalism of view by which the ecclesiastical spirit is so frequently characterised. It is probable that he was in frequent consultation with

the public-spirited men who were actively engaged in meeting the exigencies of the time, and many of whom placed great reliance on his sincerity and wisdom. Yet obviously his was the ruling, animating mind. His ideas, his very words, were echoed in the deliberations of the Signorial palace, and the decisions reached were but the formal reproduction of the proposals which he had advanced. He stood now in a position hitherto unprecedented in the history of Christendom—that of a preacher dictating from the pulpit the policy and business of a State. There was no abatement of his zeal for the moral and spiritual elevation of the people; he was still fervently intent on proclaiming the great truths of religion and winning men into obedience to God. But profoundly anxious for the welfare of the city, and positively convinced of the Divine enlightenment given him, he was impelled to assume the function of legislative director, and to use his power as a religious teacher in establishing a form of government which he believed to be in accordance with the will of God. His utterances in the Cathedral rang with an accent of Heaven-born inspiration which never faltered. He stood there and spoke as the prophet of the Lord, like another Moses, another Samuel, proclaiming the behests of the Eternal King whose loyal subjects he wished the Florentines to be; and, conscious in himself of no self-aggrandising aims, bent only on founding a healthier and happier civic and political life on the sure principles of justice and righteousness, he gave forth his judgments on the questions at issue with an enthusiasm so contagious, and an energy of conviction so overpowering, as to compel general assent and strike opposition dumb.

And many competent witnesses, free from suspicion of bias in Savonarola's favour, have declared their admiration of the form of government established in Florence by his means. Professor Villari quotes the testimony of such eminent political thinkers as Machiavelli, Giannotti, and Francesco Guicciardini — themselves Florentines — in proof of the wise, moderate, and balanced character of the remodelled constitution, which avoided alike the extremes of aristocratic exclusiveness and democratic turbulence, and secured the largest amount of privilege and well-ordered freedom compatible with the circumstances of the time. It has been the frankly expressed verdict of many since that the political system then framed was the best and most just that the Florentine people ever enjoyed. The chief defect detected in it, both by contemporary and later writers, was its failure to provide for a *Gonfaloniere*, or President, for life, or at least a President whose tenure of office should extend over a period of years instead of only over a few months. Yet even those who have advanced this criticism have been constrained to acknowledge that, in the condition of feeling and of parties then existing in Florence, the difficulties connected with such a provision, particularly the difficulty of selection, would have been a serious peril at the outset of the new régime. The wonder ever remains that a preaching friar, whose vocation afforded no special training in the business of State, should have been the moving spirit and presiding genius in reorganising the Republic on lines so sagacious and, at that stage of history, so practically sound.

# CHAPTER XIII

## The Dream of a Theocracy

A REVOLUTION had been accomplished and a republican government restored to Florence, and all without the deplorable excesses of riot, plunder, and bloodshed which in those days were the usual accompaniments of sudden political change. Thanks to the exertions of Savonarola, partisan fury and popular violence had been kept under a singular and happy restraint. The refounding of a free constitution was hailed by the citizens with emphatic demonstrations of joy; and to mark the opening of a new era in the history and fortunes of the city, the famous bronze statue of Judith and Holofernes by Donatello, which had formerly belonged to the Medici, was set up at the gateway of the Signorial palace, bearing an inscription which stated that it had been placed there by the citizens as a memorial of the safety of the commonwealth.

In the meantime, amid all the strain of directing the work of political reconstruction, a remarkable effect had been produced on Savonarola's own mind. We have seen how, in those exciting months at the close of 1494 and the beginning of 1495, the Florentines of all ranks had put themselves under his guidance and accepted his leadership as the messenger of

Heaven in the framing of their laws. This ready submissiveness on their part, and the enthusiastic confidence reposed in him, woke into new energy and vividness a conception which had hovered before his thought for many years. Ever since he found his true power in the pulpit, it had been the cherished aim of his heart to convert Florence into a city of the Heavenly King. He dreamed of a theocracy, a strictly ordered Christian State, in which immorality should be suppressed, social and civic life be ruled by the precepts of the Gospel, charity, righteousness, and the fear of God be enthroned in men's hearts, and private interest sacrificed to the common good. And now that he had attained his extraordinary position as virtual arbiter of the city's destinies, he was encouraged to believe that the time had come for translating this fair dream into a reality. That unique concurrence of circumstances which placed him where he stood—was it not a sign from above that the grand task which had long fired his hopes was at last made possible and should now be essayed? Florence was a city beloved of God, a peculiar object of celestial favour and care, destined to be the scene of Divine manifestations and to stand as a witness of the truth to all the States around. That he had long believed, and often expressly declared, and the opportunity, as it seemed, had arrived for lifting the chosen city to the full proof of its privilege in the designs of the Supreme. He would change Florence into a home of moral rectitude and political freedom; he would rally its citizens together as the subjects of the Most High, and the reign of justice and purity would begin. He himself would be the viceroy of Heaven, declaring the will of the

Invisible Lord, and enforcing the laws which he was commissioned to reveal. It was a bold idea, and there was boldness also in the steps taken to carry it out. The first announcement of it gave rise to an extraordinary exhibition of enthusiasm. It was in one of his early political sermons from the Book of Haggai, during the Advent of 1494. Discoursing on the preference which some might be imagined to entertain for a monarchical form of government, and holding his audience for a while in suspense, the preacher exclaimed, "Well, Florence, God is willing to satisfy thee, and to give thee a Head, a King to govern thee. This King is Christ. The Lord will govern thee Himself, if thou consent, O Florence. Suffer thyself to be guided by Him. . . . Take Christ for thy Master, and remain subject to His law." Then, after enlarging on the spiritual and temporal wealth and the mighty influence for good over Italy and other nations which the acceptance of such Divine sovereignty would bring, he clinched his appeal by a direct and thrilling challenge: "Florence, Jesus Christ, who is King of the universe, hath willed to become thy King in particular. Wilt thou have Him for thy King?" The multitude, swayed by one irrepressible feeling, burst into a great shout, *Viva Gesù Cristo nostra Re;* and the exclamation in which they thus proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Monarch of their choice became the watchword of the new order of things.

Having received a response so ardent to his lofty conception, Savonarola addressed himself with characteristic decision of purpose to the means necessary for its fulfilment in actual fact. His sermons even on political subjects rang with solemn pressing calls to

the people to rise to the height of the great idea which, at his challenge, they had so warmly embraced. He made it abundantly clear that his zeal in labouring for the institution of a free government was actuated solely by a desire to ensure the triumph of morality and religion, which are the stable foundations of national well-being. He summoned the citizens of Florence to put down vice with a rigorous hand, to sweep obscenity from their streets, to reform their manners, lay aside their luxury, their indecent attire and gaudy finery, and, instead of pursuing frivolity and pleasure, to give themselves to the worship and service of God. He even went so far as to exhort the magistrates to bring all the harlots into some public place with the sound of trumpet, to punish gamblers, to pierce the tongues of blasphemers, to prohibit balls and dancing—injunctions which betrayed a touch of that ascetic severity from which he never was quite free.

Thus from the pulpit of the Duomo he strove to inaugurate the ideal polity which he conceived himself charged by a Divine warrant to set up. With the political excitement there was now blended a strange religious fervour, and politics and religion were curiously mingled together in the sermons which the crowds gathered to hear. Those crowds, indeed, swelled to an unprecedented degree, and within the Cathedral wooden galleries had to be erected in the form of an amphitheatre, to provide a larger amount of room. Not only from the city itself, but from the country round, men and women of all grades hurried in the early morning and stood waiting in the piazza, filling the space between the lofty but then unfinished façade

of the great building and the quaint octagonal church of San Giovanni Battista—long so familiarly known as the Baptistery—with its black and white marbles and its marvellously embellished bronze doors, which Michael Angelo declared worthy to be the gates of Paradise; while Giotto's Campanile, with its rich colour, delicate tracery, and matchless grace, rose "fair and light as a lily stalk" against the steel-blue sky. It was bewildering to see that mass of people, says Burlamacchi, coming with jubilee and rejoicing to the sermon as if to a wedding. Then, when the doors were opened and the throng pressed in, "the silence was great in church, each one going to his place; and he who could read, with a taper in his hand, read the service and other prayers. And though many thousand people were there collected together, no sound was to be heard, until the arrival of the children, who sang hymns with so much sweetness that heaven seemed to have opened. Thus they waited three or four hours till the Padre entered the pulpit." Very seldom did the huge and eager assembly fail to experience some vivid sensation. Sometimes Savonarola was himself carried away by an overmastering ecstasy of spiritual rapture, and on such occasions astonishing effects were produced on his audience. Not only the common people, but the educated, persons of rank, artists, and men of letters, betrayed signs of the deepest emotion, and gave way to sobbing and tears; and Lorenzo Violi, the shorthand writer who took notes of the sermons, was obliged repeatedly to explain, "At this point I was overcome with weeping and could not go on." Not a few, as they left the church, tore off their ornaments, and gave them

as an offering to God, or took them to the magistrates for the use of the State. As for the orator himself, the exhaustion resulting from such extreme tension of feeling not seldom laid him prostrate for several days.

It is not surprising that at such a period, and under emotions so intense and overpowering, there should have arisen stories of supernatural wonders and amazing appearances as frequently manifest while Savonarola was preaching. It was said that some beheld angels hovering over him; that the Virgin Mary herself was seen blessing him with uplifted hand while he pronounced the benediction on the worshipping assembly; that palms of martyrdom crowned his head. Such tales of marvel, though due, no doubt, to the high-strung excitement to which the imagination of his hearers was often wrought, are yet a testimony to the seraphic fervour and sacred passion with which he spoke; and they reveal the feeling entertained of the rare sanctity and greatness of the man. So much of truth, at least, must lie behind; for legends, as has been said, are like the clouds that gather upon the mountain summits, and show the height and take the shapes of the peaks about which they cling.

The legislative measures he proposed for the government of the city, and the rules he laid down for the private and social life of the people, were enforced in the name of God, whose commands he unhesitatingly asserted them to be. Preaching, as he most frequently did, from the books of the Old Testament, he assumed a tone of authority in giving to the warnings, threatenings, and appeals of the

Psalms and Prophets an interpretation directly applicable to his own time and to the state of things around him. They were all as plainly and intentionally addressed to Florence, to Rome, to Italy, as they had been to Israel and Judah. And in support of his title to speak as an organ of prophetic illumination, he again and again called attention to the predictions uttered by him which had been signally, and even literally, fulfilled. He made striking use also of the visions which had been granted to him in hours of spiritual brooding and prayer, when the gleam of some momentous truth or the forecast of some critical event broke in upon his entranced soul. Indeed, from this point onward his references to those visions, and his dependence on them as a ground of authority, became a more predominant feature in his preaching.

In those visions Savonarola himself had a profound belief. Time and the knowledge gained by historical research have amply vindicated the honest purity and simplicity of his character; and the theory is no longer rationally tenable, that he was driven by vanity or by love of power to take refuge in the deliberate pretension to prophetic enlightenment and supernatural gifts. It does seem strange that a man of such strong intellectual force, wide learning, and clear practical sagacity should have carried his faith in Divine apparitions and revelations so far as he did. We have to remember, however, the deep mystical tendency of his nature, observable even in his youth, which grew with the growing years, fostered by many a long vigil and by much fasting and prayer. We have to remember the traditions of monastic piety amid which his religious life had

mainly developed, and also the peculiar influences of his age. We can conceive how, out of his profound mysticism and his strenuous endeavour to get into vital touch with the Divine mind and will, his conviction of actual communications from heaven was born. And we can see, moreover, how this conviction, once formed, was sustained and confirmed in his view by the ready and reverent acceptance by the people of all that he declared as divinely revealed to his soul. It was an extravagance of the religious imagination, into which he glided by the slow but steady pressure of the atmosphere of inward longing and outward environment in which he lived. Yet how sincere he was in it all is sufficiently evident from the style of argument he employs in his *Compendium Revelationum*, the singular work in which the credentials of his prophetic mission were offered to the world.

This work was published in August 1495, at the very height of his career, when, after guiding the city through its most urgent political difficulties, he was in the full current of his labours for the reformation of its manners. The book opens with a distinct avowal of his power of predicting future events by Divine inspiration. God, he asserts, reveals the things of the future to those whom He specially chooses—in the first place, by infusing a certain supernatural light, by means of which the prophet perceives that the matters revealed to him are true and proceed from God, just as the light of reason makes the philosopher certain of his first principles and the ordinary man certain that two and two make four; secondly, by flashing that which He wishes him to know and foretell, either directly upon the prophet's

mind, or through the medium of a symbolical vision, or by means of words heard, and known to be communicated through the ministry of angels. Having stated these as his fundamental positions, Savonarola passes on to speak of Florence as the centre chosen by God for the giving forth of His revelations to Italy, and of himself as the messenger through whom the revelation should be conveyed, adducing in proof of his claim the memorable instances in which his announcements of the Divine purpose had been verified by the actual course of events. But the extraordinary part of the work is that in which he describes his visionary journey to Paradise, a journey which he pictures himself as having undertaken as the ambassador of Florence to the Virgin Mary at the court of heaven. The whole narrative is an allegorical fancy, the gist of which had already been given in a sermon in May 1495. Its chief interest consists in the dialogue which the writer represents as having taken place between himself and the Tempter, who meets him in the guise of a holy hermit, and who suggests to him every possible objection to the confidence he has in the possession of a supernatural gift. Is he not misguided by a certain simplicity, or trifling with God's truth in his predictions? If he is not a deceiver, is he not moved by a spirit of melancholy, or by a disordered imagination? Or is he not himself deceived by the power of the devil? Is he not professing to reveal things which it is not given to mortal man to know, or making a cunning use of the knowledge he has gained by his friendship with politicians and princes? and so on. One by one, with painstaking care and directness, Savonarola

endeavours to refute those objections and to establish his honesty and good faith. At one point he makes the solemn asseveration, "If ever I have used deception in my preaching, may God blot me out of the Book of Life." There is high colouring in the scene of the heavenly court and the jewelled throne on which the Virgin appears as the Protecting Saint of Florence; and the descriptions given have a graphic vigour and picturesqueness of detail which not seldom remind the reader of Dante's *Paradiso*. The book closes with a Divine message to the Florentine people, predicting that after trials and tribulations their city would come forth more glorious than before.

Savonarola renewed the defence of his prophetic claims in another tractate published two years later, in 1497, entitled *Dialogo della Verità Profetica*. It was an attempt to state and justify the grounds of certainty he had in the truth of his revelations; but the argument drew him into a labyrinth of logical subtleties which proved the extreme difficulty of establishing on a clear basis of reason the peculiar authority he assumed as the chosen medium of Divine communications.

It is not necessary at the present day to question the reality of Savonarola's forecasts of future events. There is abundant testimony from his own times to the striking and repeated anticipation of changes in the civil and political affairs of Italy which ere long actually transpired. Yet when we take into account the clear-seeing, watchful alertness of his mind, his exceptional insight into the moral forces at work in his generation, his large grasp, derived from constant study of Scripture history and prophecy, of the

principles which underlie the workings of Providence, together with his comparative freedom from the blinding effect of partisan passion and prejudice, it need not astonish us that he should have been able to utter many predictions which after events proved true. All this is perfectly intelligible apart from the influence of any supernatural insight, into the belief of which he was unconsciously deluded by his own mystic ideas.

The great mass of the people, however, were powerfully impressed by the claims he advanced, and large numbers looked up to him with profoundest reverence as their guide. Nor was it only in the pulpit that Savonarola exercised his power. Intent on his theocratic conception, he laboured to relieve the unjust burdens under which many in the city were suffering. Where Christ rules, the needy and the hard-pressed should be helped; and, acting on that principle, he threw himself into the work of establishing the *Monte di Pietà*, an institution designed to deliver the poorer classes from the excessive exactions of the Jewish money-lenders. He made strenuous efforts to procure subscriptions for this purpose, and succeeded also in getting regulations passed, which, while liberating borrowers from their oppressive debts, provided for the obtaining of loans at a moderate and reasonable rate of interest.

Education also was a subject to which he devoted special attention, his aim being to give it a more earnest moral and religious character. He adopted every means in his power to purify the literature used in the schools, and to withdraw the rising generation from frivolous pursuits and sensuous pleasures.

Thus, by ceaseless activities of various kinds, the

indefatigable reformer strove to infuse a higher spirit into the life of the city, and to advance the sway of Christ as Lord and King of the State. His enthusiasm communicated itself to multitudes in every rank of society, and ere long his consecrated exertions, which involved a severe tax on his strength, bore fruit in a complete and astonishing change in the manners of the Florentine people. Libertines abandoned their vices; roystering youths became decorous and devout; the theatres and taverns were emptied; card-playing and dice-throwing disappeared; women laid aside their costly ornaments and flaunting attire, and dressed plainly; fasts were observed with new solemnity, and grew so frequent that the butchers were almost ruined. Hymns were sung in the streets instead of the licentious songs and carnival choruses hitherto so popular. Artisans occupied their leisure hours in reading the Bible and religious books. The churches overflowed, and shops were closed during the time of preaching. Bankers and merchants were constrained to restore the gain unjustly acquired. Deadly enemies were reconciled. A fervour of charity seemed to be universal, and the money which otherwise would have been squandered on luxury and finery, or lost at the gambling-table, now found its way into the alms-boxes for behoof of the poor. There was, moreover, an extraordinary rush for admission into the convents. In San Marco itself the number of monks increased from fifty, as at first, to over two hundred and thirty, and among the newly enrolled brethren were the young sons of several noble families, as well as men of mature age who had won distinction in literature, science, or politics.

This extraordinary moral and religious reformation was not altogether superficial. Considering the life-long influence for good exerted on the men who supported Savonarola in his higher work among the people, and who cherished his memory and adhered to his principles after he was gone,—many of them men of real weight of character and of more or less note in learning or public affairs,—it is a reasonable conclusion that there must have been hundreds of others, scattered through society, whose lives were refined and purified by the great movement of which he was the heart and soul. There must have been a very powerful and genuine revival of godliness. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the outward amendment, everywhere so patent, did not represent a correspondingly marked and widespread spiritual vitality. Events gradually showed that the yoke of religious austerity Savonarola imposed was one which the Florentines were not prepared by their own living convictions to sustain. The standard of conduct on which he insisted was too monastic; it left scant room for the healthy play of natural human feeling. There was too much repression in the system of things which he sought to inaugurate. It was too dependent for its practical efficiency on the influence of legal prohibitions, and more especially on the coercion of supernatural fears. It was an attempt to enforce by the sheer pressure of authority a degree of morality which could only be genuinely attained by free personal choice. And while the magic of his eloquence, the prestige of his mission as the spokesman of Heaven, the admiration and gratitude evoked by his priceless services in saving and reconstructing the Republic, enabled him to wield a dictatorial ascendancy

and to effect a marvellous reform in the habits and manners of the citizens, yet to a large extent the change thus wrought lacked the elements necessary to give it solid depth and reality. It would be far from true to say that the religious and moral revival which he produced was a sudden flame that flashed up for a moment and then went out. Yet the admission must be made that in a certain measure it was spasmodic and forced.

Savonarola had ventured on a daring experiment in attempting to convert the Florentine commonwealth into a theocracy, and to set up the Kingdom of Heaven in the very heart of Italy; and undoubtedly his success in moulding the lives of the Florentine people into an apparent harmony with his bold conception is astounding. It illustrates the moral fascination of his character and the commanding power of his personality. His theocracy was a lofty dream, and with an entire unselfishness and a purity of motive which it is impossible to doubt, he laboured to get it realised. But the task was beyond his strength in the form in which he struggled for its accomplishment, or by the means on which he so largely relied. Human nature cannot be pressed into goodness as he expected to press it. As Calvin afterwards found in Geneva, so Savonarola found in Florence, a strong and noble mind, by positive mastery of high-purposed will, and brandishing the terrors of retributive judgment, may impose its own rigid rules of life on a body of people, and may obtain a remarkable degree of visible acquiescence and submission, and yet fail to inspire permanently more than a limited proportion of the mass with its own grand and vital ideas. Savonarola deserves conspicuous

honour, and it should be frankly conceded. He did a splendid spiritual work in his day; he kindled the higher life in many hearts in the city and provinces around; he stirred the Church to a new sense of its responsibility; he made religion a mightier and more living force than it had been for several generations. But he was betrayed into a flight of pious extravagance when he sought to drill Florence into subjection to Christ's law and to regenerate its society by the austere methods of asceticism.

# CHAPTER XIV

## The Burdens and Perils of Power

Savonarola had now reached the climax of his greatness. He was the leading spirit in Florence, and in 1495 the political, social, and religious life of the city was controlled by his forceful, strenuously earnest mind. His sway was an exalted dictatorship, animated by a righteous purpose and by a disinterested regard for the public weal. Yet in that season of triumph, possessing almost absolute power, the great Friar was acutely conscious of the tremendous difficulties of his position and of the task he had taken in hand. While the citizens crowded round his pulpit, rejoicing in their restored freedom, and eager to honour the man to whose exertions their improved liberal government was due, he was weighed down by a profound sadness in presence of the corruptions in society which had yet to be overcome, and the intractable elements and tempers with which he had to deal. There was still the note of warning in his sermons, still the old dominant thought of the scourge that must fall ere the Church and Italy should be renewed. There was also a new note, now for the first time heard, the note of dark foreboding as to his own personal danger and fate. Amid all the admiration lavished upon him, there were

not wanting signs of impatience at his interference in public affairs. Political jealousy it was inevitable that he should incur, and complaints began to be raised that he was stepping beyond his province. Moreover, his stringent measures for the suppression of immorality and frivolity were a cause of grievous offence.

Savonarola had to share the experience of all advanced reformers who have endeavoured to remove abuses and to regenerate and purify the life of their age. Detraction, envy, and opposition—at first subtly veiled, but gradually becoming more open and pronounced—assailed him; and he soon found it necessary to defend the part he was taking in politics and public life. In one memorable sermon, to which reference has already been made, he pictured himself under the figure of a youth who left home and launched forth on the sea to fish, and was carried far out on the waters, beyond sight of port, bitterly bewailing his fate. He had been led from the liberty and quiet he craved for by the desire to preach and in the hope of winning souls, but the Lord had brought him out on the high seas, with no harbour in view, difficulties on every side, tribulations and tempests gathering before his eyes, and the wind driving him farther forth into the deep. "O Lord," he cried, "whither hast Thou led me? Through my desire to save souls for Thee, I am come into a place from which I can no longer return to my rest. . . . I see in all directions war and discord coming upon me. You at least, my friends, the chosen of God, for whom I afflict myself day and night, have pity upon me! Give me flowers, as the Canticle says, 'for I am sick of love.' The flowers that I ask for are

good works, and I only yearn for you that ye please God and save your souls." He had not, he averred, thrust himself forward, but had been carried on in the work he was doing by the constraint of circumstances and the will of Heaven, his one aim the eternal well-being of the Florentine people. And as for personal aggrandisement—not that, but something far different was the recompense he looked for in the enterprise on which he had embarked. "What reward, O Lord," he cried, "shall be granted in the life to come to him who is victorious in a battle such as this? That which the eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear—eternal blessedness. And what the reward granted in this life? 'The servant shall not be greater than his master,' answers the Lord. 'Thou knowest that after preaching I was crucified; so martyrdom shall befall thee also.'" Then, with a thrill of consecrated passion in his voice, he pleaded, "O Lord, Lord, grant me, I pray Thee, this martyrdom, and make me ready to die for Thee, as Thou hast died for me. Already the knife is sharpened for me. But the Lord tells me, Wait yet for a little while, so that the things may come which have to follow, and then thou shalt use that strength which shall be given thee."

This presentiment of his tragical end, at the very height of his popularity and power, indicates his knowledge of elements of hostility at work around him. The spirit of faction is never long asleep, and soon it became evident that discord was being fomented among particular sections of the citizens. New party names were heard in Florence. The followers of Savonarola, who had come to be familiarly spoken of as the Frateschi, and who were decidedly in the majority and

included the devout and honest-minded of all classes, were now ridiculed as *Piagnoni*—the Weepers. His most implacable opponents earned by their fierce rancour the title of *Arrabbiati*—the Maddened, the Furious. They were chiefly men of wealth and rank, who schemed for the restoration of an aristocratic republic, such as Florence had possessed in the days preceding the Medici rule. They were the sworn foes of the Medici, by whom their influence had been supplanted, but they were equally inflamed against Savonarola as the founder of a popular government which they detested. There was a violent section of this party, consisting principally of dissolute and turbulent youths, who somewhat later came into notoriety as the *Compagnacci*—the Evil Companions; and by none were the politics of Savonarola, his religious teaching, and especially the decorous mode of life he enforced, regarded with more vehement aversion. At the opposite extreme from the Arrabbiati stood the *Bianchi*—the Whites, the radicals of the day, who objected to the limited franchise of Savonarola, but acquiesced in his polity generally as favourable to liberty. More numerous, and far more dangerous because of the secrecy of their proceedings, were the *Bigi*, or Greys, the adherents of the Medici, who, though indebted to Savonarola for the amnesty which had enabled them to live in peace and safety in the city, repaid his generosity by plotting his downfall and treacherously intriguing for Piero de Medici's return.

The enmity of the Arrabbiati was revealed at an early stage. While the first provisionally appointed Accopiatori were still in power but unable to act, Filippo Corbizzi, a declared opponent of Savonarola

and of the popular institutions he was advocating, was elected by a sort of accident as Gonfaloniere, and at once lent his aid to the aristocratic party's designs. He convoked in the Palazzo a council of theologians and ecclesiastics, and laid before them a proposal to call the Prior of San Marco to account for his intrusion into business which politicians should be left to arrange. Savonarola was sent for, and on his appearance was assailed by a storm of abuse, in which the chief part was taken by Tommaso da Rieti, an acute little friar, head of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella, who delivered a harangue on the text that no man warring for God entangles himself with secular affairs. Savonarola listened patiently till his accuser had finished, and then calmly said in reply that now he found fulfilled the words, "My mother's children have risen up against me;" that he was grieved to see his fiercest foe clothed in the robe of San Dominic—a robe that called to mind the number of good and saintly men, not forgetting the founder of the order himself, who, while wearing it, had been concerned in affairs of State, such as Cardinal Latino, St. Peter Martyr, and St. Antonino; that it was no crime in a monk to be mixed up with the doings of the world, unless he had nothing higher in view than a worldly end and no regard for the good of religion. He closed by daring any of those present to quote a single passage of the Bible which condemned the support of a free government for the sake of helping the triumph of religion and morality. The assembly could only answer by demanding a plain proof of his Divine warrant for preaching as he did. With the simple retort that he had spoken openly before the world, and now had nothing more to add,

he turned abruptly away, and the meeting broke up, a failure.

About the same time he received a mandate from Rome directing him to proceed to Lucca and preach there the sermons for Lent. This also was the work of the Arrabbiati, who were resolved to have him removed or silenced. Savonarola himself was prepared to submit to the Papal decree, believing, as he avowed in one of his sermons, that it behoved him to obey orders and not create scandal. He was just then, however, in the full current of his political and reforming activity, and the voice of Florence was loud in protest against the very suggestion of his removal. It was felt that he could not be spared at such a juncture, that his presence was indispensable to the construction of the new government and the consolidation of the Republic. The Signory espoused his side, and the Council of the Ten were especially urgent in sending remonstrances to Rome and endeavouring to procure the recall of the Papal Brief. Alexander VI. was at last persuaded to yield, influenced largely by fear of political complications, Charles of France being still at Naples, and ready to resent any offence given to his allies, as the Florentines continued to be. Thus Savonarola was permitted to remain at his post and to pursue the course of public usefulness on which he had been launched. But his sentiment of obedience received a shock. He had obtained an insight into the doings and intrigues of the Papal Court, and into the thoroughly secular and often unworthy motives which prompted the issue and the withdrawal of Papal decrees.

Neither the harassment of opposition nor the weight

of care, however, could quench the ardour of that unflinching, masterful mind. Sustained by the consciousness of his mission and the purity of his own high aims, Savonarola went on with his work, preaching, counselling, organising, extending his regulative power over the common life of the city, confronting difficulties and antagonisms, and living for months at a pressure which again and again brought on a collapse of physical strength. Yet never did he enjoy in fuller measure the fervent goodwill and devotion of the people at large. In spite of all the plots of hostile factions, his was the only leadership which the mass of the Florentines would consent to obey. To the well-meaning and honestly disposed he was a source of uplifting spiritual power, stirring them to higher aims and thrilling them with a sense of the great things for which it was worthy to live and strive. His very presence, with the air of lofty purpose about him, was itself a stimulus to the better nature of all earnest citizens, and helped them to realise with glowing intensity the nobility of the life of faith. In those days the regal spirit of the man shone out with inspiring brilliance, and, like Schiller's hero in *Wallenstein*, wherever he moved he created the wonderful.

During the summer of 1495 the shadow of trouble again hovered over the city. Charles VIII. was now marching north on his return from Naples, with Piero de Medici in his train. His expedition had been a sort of triumphal progress, and he had conquered the Neapolitan kingdom almost without striking a blow. His unexampled success, however, aroused an alarm among the princes of Italy, which was shared by the

rulers of several foreign States. Ludovico of Milan, who had turned round and abandoned his friendship for France, Pope Alexander VI., Venice, Ferdinand of Spain, and the Emperor Maximilian I. entered into a coalition against Charles, and formed the famous "Holy League," professedly for the defence of Christendom against the Turks and the preservation of the rights of the chair of St. Peter, but really for the expulsion of the "barbarians" from Italy. Charles had thus been compelled to retire, and it was expected that he would pass through the territory of Florence on his northward route. The Florentines, though still true to their alliance with the King, and refusing to join the League, had reason to dread his interposition on behalf of Piero's restoration. The Medici party were on the alert, waiting to seize their opportunity, but the friends of the new constitution furnished themselves with arms, and resolutely prepared to protect their liberties. Savonarola, while encouraging their patriotic zeal, counselled them to patience, and above all things, unity; then, he promised, victory should be theirs, even if all the world were against them. As Charles and his army drew near, his curt and churlish treatment of the ambassadors sent by the Republic still further darkened the aspect of affairs. Once more Savonarola was induced to step forward and meet the difficulty. He had written several letters to the King since his former interviews with him, acknowledging him as the chosen instrument of God, and claiming the right in God's name to keep him faithful to his covenant with Florence. Now he went to Charles in person at Poggibonsi, on the road to Siena, and spoke in the same high tone, telling the King that

he had incurred the wrath of God by neglecting that work of reforming the Church which he had been charged to undertake. "This time," he said, "you will escape the danger which threatens you, but if you again disregard the command which He repeats through me, His unworthy servant, and still refuse to take up the work which He commits to you, I warn you that He will punish you with far more terrible misfortunes, and will choose another in your place." The result of this solemn and authoritative remonstrance was that Charles passed on, leaving the Florentines unmolested, and Savonarola established for himself a new title to public favour.

The emergency, however, lent additional weight to one of the many cares which lay upon his heart—the risk that menaced the Republic so long as there existed the possibility of calling a Parlamento. This assembly of the whole body of the citizens, convened in the piazza at the sound of the great bell, had all the appearance of a thoroughly democratic institution, but was liable to abuse, and had repeatedly been abused, in furthering the designs of tyranny. Savonarola saw in it a danger to all really free and enlightened government, and the fear of its being employed by the adherents of the Medici in the interests of Piero impelled him to labour for its abolition, and thereby save Florence from the caprice of the mob, who might at any moment be cajoled by delusive promises or cowed by threats. Indeed, his apprehensions on this point roused him to speak from the pulpit in language which was startlingly excessive in its vehemence. He urged the people never to allow a Parlamento to assemble, as it was nothing else than a means of taking power out

of their hands. If a new law was to be made, the Grand Council could make it. The Signory, he said, on entering office should be obliged to take an oath not to call a Parlamento, and heavy penalties should be inflicted on any person who should secretly attempt to call one,—"if he be of the Signory, let his head be struck off; if he be not of it, let him be declared a rebel, and his goods confiscated." Nay, if the Signory as a body should endeavour to summon a Parlamento, the moment they appear in front of the Palazzo "any man may cut them to pieces without being guilty of sin." This sermon was delivered on 28th July 1495, and early in the following month a law was passed declaring that no Parlamento should in future be held.

That the risk which moved Savonarola to such violence of speech was not imaginary, was proved soon afterwards, when Piero de Medici, assisted by the Italian League and encouraged by the intrigues of his supporters within the city, made an attempt to force an entrance into Florence. The enterprise failed ignominiously, but it revealed the need of vigorous precautions for the security of the new constitution and the freedom it conferred. It drew from Savonarola one of his most tremendous outbursts of denunciatory declamation. Holding the crucifix in his hand, he sent his voice pealing out over the Cathedral, declaring that whosoever would seek to bring back the Medici to Florence should be put to death. "Will you who pay no respect to Christ, have respect to private citizens? Do justice, I tell you. Off with his head! Even were he the chief of the first family in the city, off, I say, with his head! . . . Trust in nought but the Great

Council, which is the work of God and not of man, and whosoever would change it, or set up a tyrant, or place the government in the hands of private citizens, let him be accursed of the Lord for ever."

Such words of fierce severity may be ascribed to the natural morbid excitability of Savonarola's temperament, strained to its utmost pitch by the exacting and long-continued tax upon his nervous energy and mental powers. At the same time it is possible to see in them a striking evidence of his irrepressible passion for liberty.

# CHAPTER XV

## The Hand of the Pope

Among the supporters of the League formed to drive Charles VIII. and his army out of Italy there was none more energetic than Pope Alexander VI. He had incurred the special enmity of Charles by first professing to favour his claims to Naples and then turning against him, and now his position was most seriously imperilled by the influence of Charles in Italian politics. The French King held over him the threat of summoning a General Council to investigate his title to the Papacy. For, shrewd and capable administrator as Alexander VI. was, and endowed with certain qualities which made him superficially popular, his character, as judged even by Roman Catholic historians, was a discredit to religion and to the pontifical throne. His life was one of unrestrained sensuality, marked both in private and public by an absence of all moral feeling; bribery was a means of power which he used with the most amazing effrontery; with systematic unscrupulousness he schemed and intrigued for the worldly advancement of his illegitimate sons and daughters, and openly tolerated in their conduct criminalities and vices which were a scandal to Italy, and which have rendered the family name of Borgia a byword

for generations. "Thus," says Dr. Pastor, "he who should have been the guardian of his time, saving all that could be saved, contributed more than any other man to steep the Church in corruption."

This was the man who most dreaded the French King, and who, now that the latter was on his retreat, was most determined to break the force of his power in Italy. The chief obstacle to his designs lay in the attitude of Florence, which still persisted in holding aloof from the League and adhering to its alliance with France. And Florence was dominated by the influence of Savonarola, through whose unflinching advocacy that alliance was upheld. He still clung to his pious hallucination that the frivolous, vacillating, dissolute King was God's chosen instrument for the reformation of the Church. Accordingly, it was now upon Florence, and upon Savonarola as the ruling spirit there, that the Pope, with the eager connivance of Ludovico of Milan, instigated the Italian powers to turn their combined hostility. It was decided that every means should be employed to detach Florence from the side of France and compel it to join the League; and so an effort of repression, originating in political rather than religious causes, was directed against the main supporter of the French alliance, the Prior of San Marco.

Alexander's purpose to silence and, if possible, extinguish this influential opponent of his policy, was confirmed by highly-coloured reports of Savonarola's denunciations of the Roman Court and its doings which were carried to his ears by the enemies of the Florentine preacher. He set to work with dexterous subtlety. On 25th July 1495 he addressed a Brief to Savonarola, in

which in friendly terms he commended him as one well known for his zeal as a worker in the Lord's vineyard, and then, referring to his predictions of future events as coming not from man but from God, he summoned him in virtue of his pastoral authority to repair at once to Rome and give a more full and direct account of the revelations he had received. Savonarola's friends, however, were suspicious of the object aimed at by this apparently mild injunction. They realised the danger to their popular government and freedom involved in the attempt to remove the guide of the whole movement from Florence, and they were afraid of a plot to have him seized or assassinated by the way; for, indeed, even in the city the adversaries of the new order were beginning to show a more deadly intention, and Savonarola had to be guarded by an armed escort as he passed to and fro between his convent and the Cathedral. Moreover, his bodily health was breaking down, and his emaciation was so extreme that he was contemplating retirement for a time from the pulpit; and therefore a journey under such conditions would have been more than he could safely bear. All these considerations were anxiously pressed upon his attention, and, after weighing them duly, he on 31st July sent a reply to the Pope requesting to be excused from coming to Rome at that particular time. He acknowledged the duty of obedience to his ecclesiastical superior, but pleaded the low state of his health and the risk to his life from the evil designs of his political foes; and further, he urged that the reformed government had not yet taken firm root, and required constant assistance, and that therefore, in the judgment of all good and wise citizens, his departure would be of

great injury to the people, while of little advantage to Rome. And for these "true and plain reasons" he asked his Holiness to allow him a brief delay. As to the explanation of his predictions concerning the future, he promised to send a little book—the *Compendium Revelationum*—which he was just getting printed, and which would be found to contain all about the matter that needed to be known.

He was taking the rest which his excessive exhaustion forced upon him, deputing his trusted disciple Fra Domenico da Pescia to preach for him in the Cathedral, when, to his astonishment, on the 8th of September a new Brief was issued by the Pope, addressed, not to the brethren of San Marco, but to the Franciscans of Santa Croce, his long-standing rivals and opponents, and speaking of him in a tone of alienated aloofness as "a certain Fra Girolamo," whose mind had been excited to such a pitch of folly that he gave himself out to be a prophet and the bearer of a mission from God, without being able to prove his claim either by miracles or by direct evidence from Holy Scripture. There was reason to fear—this Brief of the man who was outraging all the moralities went on to say—lest vice should make an entrance into the Church under the semblance of virtue. The Pope, it continued, could forbear no longer. The Fra Girolamo was commanded to refrain from preaching of any kind. Moreover, the "scandalous severance" of his convent from the Lombard Congregation must cease, and he must henceforth bow to the authority of the Lombard superior; and all this under pain of being visited by the ban of the Church.

Savonarola was painfully embarrassed. He was

unwilling to place himself in an attitude of open rebellion against the Pope, yet he knew that the whole difficulty was due to the plots of the Arrabbiati and Medici parties, who were working through the Pope for the restoration of tyranny. He made his reply on the 29th of September. It was a defence of his teaching in view of the reports by which the Holy Father had been deceived, and a humble but firm protest against the reunion of San Marco with the Lombard Congregation. In his doctrine, he said, he had always been submissive to the Church, and the events he had foretold had come to pass, as many witnesses could testify. He argued that the reunion with the Lombard friars would only deepen the rancour already existing between the two congregations, and give rise to fresh disputes. If that reunion was sought in order to prevent others from lapsing into his errors, he believed he had made it plain that he had not lapsed into any error, and hence as the cause was non-existent, neither should its effect remain. He recited the services he had rendered to Florence in arresting bloodshed and destroying dissension in a time of trouble, and in establishing religion, morality, and peace; and he besought his Holiness to grant him full acquittal from the false charges made against him, concluding with the declaration that now and always, as he had often repeated, he submitted himself and all his words and writings to the correction of the Holy Roman Church and "of your Holiness, to whose prayers, prostrate at your feet, I most humbly commend myself and all my brethren."

Alexander was a man of astute practical sagacity, and on the receipt of this reply he recognised the necessity

of proceeding with studied caution. Though annoyed for the moment by the Florentine preacher's obstinate opposition to his will, he yet deemed it wise not to push matters to extremity, but to attain his object, if possible, by discreet and diplomatic means. On the 16th of October he sent another Brief, in which Savonarola was told that serious displeasure had been caused at Rome by the disturbances which, it was alleged, his teaching had produced in Florence, but that now great joy was felt in the assurance, gathered from his letter lately received and from the testimony of many cardinals, that he was ready, as a good Christian, to submit to the Church in all things. Hence the Pope began to be persuaded that he had erred rather through excess of zeal than through any evil intent. However, lest there should be any failure of duty, he was commanded, in the name of holy obedience, to abstain from preaching either in public or private, until he was able with convenience and safety to appear himself in Rome, or until a commission had been sent to Florence. If he obeyed this command, all the former Briefs would be revoked, and he might live in peace according to the dictates of his own conscience. Ere this Brief, which from some unexplained cause took a long time to reach Florence, was delivered, Savonarola had reappeared in the pulpit, and had done his utmost to encourage the citizens to resist the expedition of Piero de Medici referred to in the previous chapter. It was then that he preached that startling sermon which called for the death of all who aided or abetted the restoration of tyranny. By the time the Brief arrived the danger was past, and Savonarola relapsed into silence.

His position, amid wily manœuvres to cripple his

power and false accusations of creating discord, was exceedingly trying. The decree prohibiting him to preach he felt to be unjust, and the reasons assigned for the prohibition based on slanderous reports. He knew that behind the vague charges brought against his teaching it was his political influence that was really assailed. But he had confidence in the rectitude of his cause, and was resolved not to desert the people, who, in spite of all the slanders, looked up to him still with unabated trust. The good work was going on, and he was anxious not to mar it by the heated excitement sure to arise if he openly quarrelled with the Pope. So he kept quiet for a while, hoping that ere long the efforts of friendly intercessors might lead to the withdrawal of the restrictions laid upon him. He brooded much on the terrible infamies of the Papal Court, on the immoral relations and the murders in which the Pope himself and the members of his family were implicated, and the only remedy for which, as he now became convinced, was the calling of a General Council. Several times he was prompted by those broodings to write to Charles VIII., exhorting him to take the steps devolving upon him as God's minister in effecting the work of the Church's renovation.

Gradually, as his strength returned, he became impatient of inaction, and in the enforced abstention from his favourite work of preaching sought employment for his energies in the reform of the children and youth of the city. He had all along shown a warm interest in the young; he had endeavoured to guide parents and teachers in the books and methods to be used in their education; he had been wont at times to preach to them, and had arranged a special place for

them in the Cathedral. Thus by the attention he gave to the rising generation around him he had succeeded in gaining their confidence and enthusiasm, and had weaned large numbers of them from their vices and frivolities. Now he entered upon a systematic effort to direct their amusements and to train them in habits of religious propriety. The Advent season of 1495 he had passed in retirement, but early in 1496, as the Carnival drew near, he was impelled to action. That annual holiday had long been characterised by scenes of wildest revelry. The Florentine boys and young men amused themselves with mad frolics and drunken feastings; with forced tolls exacted from passengers on the street by barring the way with poles till the money was paid; and with huge bonfires, round which they danced and sang, or over which they pelted one another with stones, often to the shedding of blood. The worst excesses of licence had been in some measure restrained since Savonarola's preaching began to tell on the manners of the city, but now that the great Friar's voice was silenced, the more reckless spirits were preparing to celebrate the occasion with all the old turbulence and uncurbed rioting. Somehow he got hold of a large band of the young Florentines, and, with the help of his faithful Fra Domenico, organised them into guilds, who chose captains for themselves. He set up altars in the streets, where the boys begged, not money for their banquets, but contributions for the poor. He gave them hymns and sacred lauds to sing — some of them written by himself — instead of the indecent rhymes of former days. And then, on the last day of the Carnival, he marshalled them in a grand procession, and led them through the

city, chaunting their pious songs, visiting the principal churches, and finally depositing the alms-boxes in the care of the guardians of the poor. The whole scene struck the imagination of the citizens; older people joined in the march; decorum took the place of riotous tumult; and the Carnival of 1496 was felt to be a triumph of Savonarola's influence for good. The boys themselves were kindled to enthusiasm; they accepted the rules of their new guilds—to avoid masquerades, theatres, gambling, dances, and the reading of licentious books; to observe simplicity of manners, conduct, and dress; to go to church, take the sacrament, and keep God's commandments. And, according to many witnesses, a distinct moral improvement became visible among the youth of the city.

Meanwhile the Signory and the Council of Ten had been anxiously soliciting the Pope and some friendly cardinals, particularly Caraffa of Naples, with the view of obtaining for Savonarola the recall of the inhibition from preaching. So far as appears, though no formal recall was issued, Alexander at last was induced to grant some verbal sanction to his reappearance in the pulpit. This is the most probable explanation of the resolution passed by the Signory on 11th February 1496, requesting him to preach the Lent sermons in the Cathedral. He readily complied with the request, and thus the first period of compulsory silence came to an end.

# CHAPTER XVI

## The Uncompromising Witness

It was amid a scene of intense excitement that, on 17th February 1496, Savonarola made his first appearance in the Cathedral pulpit after an interval of several months. A jubilant throng gathered round him on his way through the streets, and an armed bodyguard marched by his side to protect him from secret foes. Inside the great building every inch of space was occupied; the vast floor and raised wooden galleries were densely crowded with a congregation of old and young, all waiting with eager expectancy to hear their beloved teacher and guide once more. And there again in the pulpit he spoke out boldly, and with unshaken assurance of his mission as the messenger of God. He declared his loyalty to the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and his readiness to submit to its decisions both himself and his teaching. But, he said, "the Pope cannot command me to do anything which is contradictory to Christian charity or the gospel. I am convinced that he never will; but were he to do so, I should reply, 'Now you are in error, and no longer a good pastor or the voice of the Church.'" As for himself, he did not believe that he was under any obligation to obey a command to leave Florence, inasmuch as

every one knew that his removal was desired solely from motives of political hatred, and would bring injury not only to liberty, but to religion. Were he to see clearly that his leaving a city would be attended with spiritual and temporal ruin to the people, he would refuse to obey the command of any living man to quit it, because he should presume that his superior in giving the command had been deceived by calumnies and lies. He had examined his ways, he avowed, and found them pure. Though convinced that the Briefs from Rome were invalid, inasmuch as they were inspired by false reports, he had resolved to be prudent, and therefore had so far kept silent. But when he saw many of the good growing lukewarm, and the wicked more and more bold, he felt himself constrained to return to his post. "I would fain remain silent, but may not, for the word of God is as a fire in my heart, and unless I give it vent, it will consume the marrow of my bones. Come then, O Lord, since Thou wouldst have me steer through these deep waters, let Thy will be done."

Neither bribes nor terrors, it was obvious, could in the slightest affect the tone or the message of that voice which was now using its liberty of utterance again. Assailed by slander and the tongue of strife, beset by the crafty plots of conspirators within the city, and by rapacious princes and a worthless Pope outside, with his life menaced by poison and by steel, Savonarola stood there in the Cathedral pulpit as the uncompromising witness for the claims of God and the rights of the people, for the freedom of the reason and the conscience of man from all authority save that which commends itself as Divine. The hand

that fain would crush him and through him the hopes of Florence, though it had relaxed its grip for a moment, was ready, he strongly suspected, to seize a pretext for tightening it again; yet he fearlessly asserted the eternal obligations of purity, justice, and charity on all ranks of men, high as well as low, and proclaimed the responsibility of the individual soul to God alone. This was the prevailing note of those Lent sermons of 1496. With astonishing variety of style, incisive vigour of phrase, boldness of imagery, abounding wealth of illustration, and redoubled fire and rush of eloquence, he denounced the vices of Rome, and the harlotries and abominations tolerated there; and declaimed against the hypocrisies in religion and the compounding by sacraments and ceremonies on particular days for general laxity and ungodliness. He predicted the woes yet to come upon Italy, the war, famine, and pestilence that would scourge its people to repentance; sounded warnings against the enemies of the Republic, against the spirit of faction, and all dishonest means of influencing the election of officials by one party or another; described the evils wrought by tyrants, whose power meant the extinction of virtue and all that was best in the life of man;—defending himself also from the aspersions of adversaries, who sought through him to strike at popular government and liberty; and insisting on his own title to interpret the Pope's commands in the light of their harmony with Christian charity and religion, instead of yielding tamely to decrees based on the lying information of detractors.

Those sermons were founded on texts taken from Amos and Zechariah, and the whole population was

stirred during the weeks in which they were delivered. The fame of them spread over Italy and into other lands; and in France, Germany, and England the powerful voice which was thrilling Florence awoke an echo in many hearts. There was an uneasy commotion also among the Italian princes, and several of them, such as Ludovico Sforza of Milan and the Duke of Ferrara, were constrained to enter into correspondence with the redoubtable preacher, remonstrating with him on the strong reproofs he was hurling against the ruling powers, and the political passions he was arousing thereby.

In Florence itself the excitement was varied on Palm Sunday by another procession of the children, specially arranged by Savonarola to celebrate the practical inauguration of the Monte di Pietà. Many thousands of boys, all clad in white, and with garlands on their heads and crosses or palm-branches in their hands, marched through the city, carrying a tabernacle adorned with a painting of the Lord Jesus riding on an ass into Jerusalem. Behind them followed a long array of men, women, and girls, also dressed in garb befitting the occasion, and again and again the cry was raised by young and old, "Live Jesus Christ, our King." The procession ended its course at the piazza of San Marco, where the monks, crowned with festal wreaths, came forth from the convent, and, forming themselves into a ring, moved gaily round the Piazza, singing hymns and with steps keeping time to the music. After this the zeal of the young people on behalf of the Fra Girolamo became quite irrepressible; their mothers could not keep them in bed on the mornings when he was to preach, so

impatient were they to be in their places in the Cathedral. Their ardour in good works restrained their elders from open sin. "It was a blessed time," wrote Landucci of that reign of reverence and pious fervour among the children,—"but brief." Yet brief as it was in its more directly religious manifestations, it planted principles and impulses in the hearts of the young Florentines of that generation which gave fibre to their character, and prepared many of them for noble action in behalf of the Republic amid the troubles and conflicts of after years.

In the midst, however, of all this popularity and admiration, there was an immense amount of partisan agitation and intrigue. In the shops and market-places, and at street corners, men talked passionately, and with sharp divergencies of opinion, on the personal merits, aims, and policy of their remarkable Friar. The Arrabbiati were busy in disseminating suspicions of his motives and in undermining his influence on the public mind. Attacks were made upon him in writing, and tracts and letters full of scurrilous accusations were circulated through the city. He was assailed in songs and ballads which held up to ridicule his sayings and doings. His disciples took up the challenge, and replied in pamphlets and verses to the insults heaped upon their master. He had still a following of overwhelming strength, but as political jealousy found time to work, and as the glamour of his first successes began to wear off, the opposing and dissentient section of the community gained confidence to give vent to their hitherto secretly nursed hostility. At Rome, again, the Pope was moved to appoint a consistory of Dominican theologians to inquire into the

charges of heresy, schism, and rebellion against the Holy See, under which the Friar and his adherents had been laid; but the only result of this gathering was a Papal message to the Signory to take care that in future Savonarola should be more guarded in his teaching, and that, "like all the best preachers," he should refrain from intermeddling with the things of this world and political affairs.

A visit which he paid to Prato at the close of Lent brought him a number of distinguished adherents from among the scholars, learned doctors, and professors of the Pisan University whom he had an opportunity of addressing there. When back again in Florence, he published his treatise *On the Simplicity of the Christian Life*, a work in which, after rebutting the charges made against him at Rome, he gave a popular and exceedingly readable account of the doctrines of the Catholic faith, stripped of the usual theological technicalities; and in his sermons on Ruth and Micah during the summer he confined himself largely to the practical questions of Christian morality. There was a lull in the controversy between him and the Pope; and in all probability it was about this time, though the date is uncertain, that an effort was made to bribe him into compliance with the Pope's wishes and policy by the offer of a cardinal's hat. The bearer of the offer, according to Burlamacchi, was an influential Dominican, who came expressly to Florence to deliver the message. Savonarola, however, was not to be bribed. When the proposal was laid before him, he courteously told the Pope's emissary that if he would condescend to be one of his auditors at his next sermon he would take means to convey his reply. That next

sermon, so far as can be ascertained, must have been one preached by request of the Signory in the new hall of the Greater Council—a noble addition to the Palazzo Vecchio which had been erected by the advice of Savonarola himself as a suitable meeting-place for the legislators of the restored Republic. In the course of his sermon there on 20th August 1496, Savonarola found occasion to say that the only red hat he wished to have was one dyed in the blood of his own martyrdom. "I seek neither hat nor mitre. I desire only that which Thou hast given to Thy saints—death, a crimson hat, a hat of blood."

For many weeks after this Savonarola abstained from preaching. The condition of Florence, owing to poverty, disease, and famine, was becoming a matter of serious concern. The unsettlement of the last two years had checked the tide of commercial prosperity. The subsidy promised to Charles VIII. and the expenses incurred by the harassing war with Pisa had laid a heavy burden on the people, and a bad harvest-season had impoverished the peasantry around, who came flocking into the city, starving and crying for bread. Pestilence broke out and aggravated the misery. The wealthier followers of Savonarola displayed most praiseworthy humanity in ministering to the wants of their poorer neighbours. Many of them gave shelter to the wandering country-folk in their own houses; others were active in succouring the sick and distressed, and in watching over them in the hospitals. At the same time the powers forming the so-called Holy League redoubled their efforts to terrorise Florence into abandoning the French alliance. Ludovico of Milan, who had first invited the French

monarch, now instigated Maximilian I. to make a descent into Italy and lend his aid in the interests of the League; while the Venetian fleet, by blockading Leghorn, cut off the Florentine supplies from abroad. And in the midst of all these calamities a heavy loss was sustained by the death of that brave soldier and honest friend of Florentine liberty, Piero Capponi, who was killed by a ball in one of the engagements of the Pisan War, leaving a blank not easy to fill. The Pope on his part was pursuing his resolve to crush the Republic and to reinstate Piero de Medici, who would be a submissive tool in his hands. The Florentines had hoped much from Charles VIII., but he failed them in their hour of need. All this was severely trying to Savonarola. It furnished ground for the reproachful taunts of his enemies. It encouraged the Arrabbiati and the adherents of the Medici to expect that his popularity would soon collapse, and the new government fall to pieces.

Yet even in that dark, distressful crisis Florence received a fresh illustration of Savonarola's amazing and seemingly unfailing power. The Signory had again to ask his aid in the public extremity, and in a sermon which he preached at their invitation in the Cathedral on 28th October, he succeeded to a singular degree in reviving the spirit and fortitude of the people. Referring to a procession which it was proposed to hold in bringing the miraculous image of the Madonna dell' Impruneta into the city, he expressed his confidence in the blessing that would attend such an act of penitential devotion. "Form this procession," he said, "it will be a goodly thing; and if you turn to God in a right spirit, I believe that some great

grace will be bestowed upon us, and we shall need to stand in fear of none." And just two days afterwards, when the long-drawn-out procession was on its way, and when the files of white-robed youths and bearded men, craftsmen in their various companies and guilds, monks and friars cowled and frocked according to their several orders, priests, canons, and dignitaries of the Church, were marching slowly, with penitential chaunts, through the hunger-stricken throng in the narrow streets, bearing the antique cabinet in which the figure of the "Pitying Mother" was enshrined, a horseman, waving an olive-branch in his hand, came galloping across one of the bridges and down the Lung' Arno, and dashed right on till he overtook the moving crowd. He was the bringer of the welcome tidings that a number of ships from France, laden with corn and soldiers, had safely arrived at Leghorn by favour of a strong wind which had kept the blockading fleet at a distance; and as the news spread shouts of joy rang out all along the packed thoroughfares; the bells were set pealing, and in the midst of the extraordinary excitement the words of Savonarola were remembered, and this additional and startling proof of his mysterious insight into the secrets of Providence awoke a new passion of popular enthusiasm in his favour, and almost for the moment paralysed his foes.

Nevertheless, vexations continued to beset him. Copies of letters, purporting to be written by himself, and urging the King of France to another invasion of Italy, had been circulated by Ludovico of Milan, who declared that he had intercepted them on their way to Charles. Savonarola pronounced the letters forged, as

subsequent revelations proved them to have been; but for the time they gave rise to misrepresentations which were acutely embarrassing. Once more also the Pope struck in with an exceedingly skilful blow. It came in the shape of a Brief, dated 7th November, and addressed to the Dominican convents in Tuscany, San Marco's among them, ordaining that they should all be united with the Dominican convents in the province of Rome, and so form one Tusco-Roman congregation, the vicar of which, in the first instance, was to be nominated by his Holiness, and to depend for his authority on the Roman Vicar-General, the supreme head of the order. The effect of such a decree was to deprive Savonarola of the independence which he had hitherto enjoyed, and to render him subject to removal from Florence at any moment which the superior at Rome might choose. Savonarola protested in a pamphlet, entitled *An Apology for the Congregation of San Marco*, in which he appealed to the public at large against the injustice of the new ordinance, grounded as it was on false information, and contrary to charity. He maintained that the union with the Roman convents proposed would involve the adoption of a less strict rule of religious life, and would undo the good work of reform which had already been accomplished; and he pleaded that he and his brothers of San Marco could not allow themselves to be cowed by threats or excommunications, but must be ready to face death rather than submit to that which would be poison and ruin to their souls. There was a trumpet-blast of revolt against all spiritual despotism in his closing words: "When the conscience rebels against a command received from a superior, we must first resist and humbly correct him, which we

have already done; but if that is not enough, then we must act like St. Paul, who, in the presence of all, withstood Peter to his face." This was a daring position to take up, and it made abundantly clear the probability that if Alexander VI. should insist on the enforcement of his decree, he would be openly and resolutely defied.

The Florentine envoy at Rome, supported by many influential friends, did all in their power to prevent such a result, and for a time definite action was suspended. Savonarola went on preaching, and in his Advent sermons on Ezekiel he urged the people to virtuous living and to gratitude to God for their free institutions; and he called on them to protect their liberty, to watch against treachery, to suppress vice, and to maintain justice. "Do justice, therefore, magnificent Signory; justice, Lords of the Eight; justice, magistrates of Florence; justice, men and women; let all cry for justice!"

There was no further sign from the Pope while these sermons were being delivered. Alexander had his own perplexities in connection with the adverse fortunes attending the military efforts of the League. Maximilian, baffled in his attempt to capture Leghorn, had retired ingloriously northwards, fuming over the jealousies, divided counsels, and general unreliableness of his Italian allies. The pressure on Florence was accordingly relieved, and in the brighter aspect of affairs Savonarola again stood out in popular estimation as the bulwark of the State, capable not only of holding his own against Rome, but also of rescuing the city from the machinations of its enemies.

# CHAPTER XVII

## The Pyramid of Vanities

The year 1497 opened for Savonarola in comparative quiet. During its first months he was engaged in writing his great theological work, *The Triumph of the Cross*. Fra Domenico da Pescia took his place in the Cathedral, and in his sermons there laboured fervently to further the progress of religious reform. Moreover, the members of the Signory just elected were all adherents of Savonarola's own party, the Piagnoni, and the social and political interests of the city appeared to be in good keeping, more especially as Francesco Valori, his zealous supporter, held the office of Gonfaloniere. With all his zeal, however, Valori was wanting in discretion, and in his anxiety to find a means of outnumbering the aristocratic opponents of the democratic government, he procured the passing of a law by which the age for admission to the Greater Council was reduced from thirty to twenty-four. Savonarola's advice was against such a step, and, as he feared, the result of the new measure was the introduction into the Council of some of the most violent young men of the Arrabbiati party. This was a section of the community which Savonarola's good work had failed to touch. He had been remarkably successful, as

we have seen, in his influence over the lads and youths of the city; but there were large numbers of the younger members of aristocratic families whose hostility to his political ascendancy was embittered by fierce irritation at the strict yoke of virtue which he imposed. These were the Compagnacci, or Evil Companions, already described—wild and dissolute young fellows, who had now banded themselves together under the leadership of the reckless Dolfo Spini, as sworn enemies of popular government, and still more as enemies of Savonarola and his rigid restraints on the extravagances, pleasures, and follies on which they were bent. By admitting such men to a power which they were only too glad to seize, Valori's new law proved a danger to the commonwealth. It brought into the region of public life a turbulent element which seriously impeded the healthy progress of the State, and henceforth it became more possible for the adversaries of Savonarola to thwart his beneficent labours and deal him a deadly blow.

For the time being, however, the distinguished Friar remained the dominant power. He had his eye and his hand on the leading movements in the city. He secured from the Signory more effective regulations for the improvement of manners. Through Fra Domenico he perfected the organisation of the children, drilling them into a sort of police force or sacred militia, whose duty it was to protest against all indecencies, reprove vice, and report on any flagrant criminalities which they might observe. There can be little doubt that those boy-police were betrayed into occasional excesses of zeal. Their methods must often have seemed inquisitorial and impertinent, and murmurs of complaint were sure to arise. Yet on the whole it is

clear that the good effect of the movement amongst the young was warmly recognised by the general body of honest and well-disposed citizens. It presented a favourable contrast to the irreverent and licentious tendencies which had hitherto been so patent.

As the Carnival again approached, Savonarola resolved on a demonstration of an unusually imposing character. He would celebrate the festival with a still more complete reversal of its profane revelries than on the previous year. Florence should be called upon to make a full and solemn sacrifice of her vanities. Accordingly, for several days the youthful disciples of the Friar were sent round the city in companies, visiting from door to door, carrying with them baskets, and calling for the surrender of all articles which might minister to luxury, frivolity, and empty show; and on every house where their demand was met they pronounced a benediction. In this way they collected an enormous number of objects usually associated with the giddy levities and self-indulgent pleasures of existence—masks, wigs, and masquerading costumes; copies of loose songs, books of amorous poetry, romances and licentious tales; ornaments and trinkets of all kinds; perfumes, cosmetics, mirrors, veils, and false hair; flutes and guitars; cards, dice, and gaming-tables; pictures of the nude, portraits of popular beauties, indecent works of art. These were borne with great glee to the Piazza della Signoria, and piled up, tier above tier, on a huge octagonal pyramid of wood which had been erected there. Then on the closing day of the festival an eager throng filled the Piazza. The thousands of children, who had marched in procession through the streets collecting money for the Good Men

of San Martino, were gathered in the central space; and while their hymns rose to the sky, and the trumpets sounded and the bells rang out, the mighty pile was set ablaze, and in whirling smoke and crackling flame its mass of miscellaneous contents was reduced to ashes.

Such was the Burning of the Vanities. So absorbing was the interest it stirred in the city, that all attempts to celebrate the Carnival with the wanton licence of old days were effectually arrested. At this modern date the spectacle wears a curious and almost fantastic aspect; but in that age, and among Italians whose minds were swayed by strong religious excitement and at the same time largely imbued with the ideas and emotions of mediævalism, it would be less calculated to produce an impression of extravagance. No protest was raised against it by the generation which witnessed the scene; and the strictures passed on Savonarola for allowing the destruction of literary treasures and works of art, which the affair is surmised to have involved, are of comparatively recent date. There may have been consumed in the great bonfire some stray copies of Boccaccio, whose writings were then in high favour, or some few pictures which it might have been of importance to preserve. Nevertheless it is extremely doubtful whether the pile really contained so much that was exceptionally valuable in art or literature as the critics have been inclined to suppose. Savonarola's censures on the indecent character of many of the writings and paintings which appealed to the popular taste of his day were certainly severe, and he was often intensely roused by the contaminating influence thereby exerted on the youth of the city. But he was no rabid icono-

clast, carried away by a frenzy of fanaticism. Had he been so he would never have gained the regard of that eminent classical scholar and student, Marsilio Ficino, who by this time had become his sincere admirer. Fond of poetry himself, he had among his friends the poet Girolamo Benivieni, who composed many of the hymns sung by the children in their processions. Though for many years Savonarola had neglected the humanities for other and graver pursuits, it was not because he despised the humanities, but because the force of circumstances and of his own sense of duty constrained him to enter on a practical moral and religious work which engrossed his thought and energy. He believed in the value of poetry as an aid to the elevation and refinement of the human mind; and in an essay which he once wrote, "In Apology of the Art of Poetry," he gave forth his views as to what true poetry should be—a means of so presenting ideas by example and figure and rhythmic language as not only to enlighten but to enchant, not only to convince but to charm.

Savonarola's genuine appreciation of the productions of literary genius is decisively proved by the exertions and sacrifices he made to rescue the Library of the Medici, which had fallen into possession of the State when the family were expelled and their property confiscated, but which was now, in the straitened condition of the public exchequer, in danger of being sold and dispersed to meet some heavy claims. The loss to Florence would have been irreparable; for no library in Europe at that time contained so rich and complete a collection of Greek and Latin classics. It was Savonarola who interested himself above all others in avert-

ing the danger. He induced the brethren of San Marco to raise money on the lands belonging to the convent, and by this means he was enabled to make a payment of two thousand florins and to undertake responsibility for a thousand more, with the result that there was secured to Florence that precious *Biblioteca Laurenziana* which is to this day one of its principal glories. And the transaction took place during the very year which witnessed the Burning of the Vanities.

With reference to the painting and sculpture of his age, he sometimes indulged in language of strong fulmination and reproof, and not without reason. There is no denying the pagan tendency which had crept into Italian art towards the close of the fifteenth century, a tendency to emphasise the sensuous side of life, to practise sensuous methods of representation, to introduce immodest sentiments and dress even into sacred pictures, "tricking out the Mother of God in the frippery of a courtesan." It was against this that Savonarola inveighed. He was no enemy to art itself. His quarrel was with what he deemed the debasement of art, and he endeavoured to purify it from its sensual taint, his contention being that art should be employed to represent elevated and spiritual loveliness and to raise the thoughts to better things. He was the counsellor and inspirer of many artists, and his influence over them was great. He founded a school of design in his own convent, and one brother, the painter Fra Bartolommeo della Porta, was his close and devoted friend. Outside the convent not a few of the most distinguished artists were to be reckoned more or less distinctly among his followers—Sandro Botti-

celli, Lorenzo di Credi, Luca della Robbia, and Perugino; the architect Cronaca, the sculptors Baccio da Montelupo, Ferrucci, Baccio Baldini, Giovanni Carniola, Michael Angelo. The last of these, and the greatest, was one of his constant hearers, and afterwards, in old age, that supremely gifted master in the domain of art sought edification in reading and rereading the sermons of the preacher who had taken a strong hold on his reverential regard. Such men were first attracted by the dash and versatility of Savonarola's genius; then they were charmed by the frequent splendour, glow, and originality of his thoughts. They saw that he had a real sense of beauty and a feeling for nature, as they themselves had, and that he understood the best ideas of classic antiquity; while at the same time they were conscious of being led by him to larger and loftier conceptions. He unveiled for them new forms of grandeur and loveliness, gave fresh stimulus to their imagination by flashing on their vision the radiance of the Christian ideal, and thereby opened for them a wider range of artistic aspiration and endeavour. Hence Dr. Pastor, quoting a number of learned authorities for the statement, declares that his "influence can be traced in many of the works of art produced by his contemporaries," and that certain incidents which Savonarola was wont to describe with graphic eloquence in his sermons were frequently chosen as subjects by Florentine artists.

It must be evident, therefore, that one whose attitude towards poetry and painting was so sympathetic and inspiring, could not have been wilfully guilty of destroying any books or pictures of sterling merit in

the memorable bonfire of 1497. The charges urged against him of displaying on that occasion a fanatical opposition to literature and art must be based on an exaggerated estimate of the value of the objects which were then consigned to the flames.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## The Sentence of Excommunication

Notwithstanding the popular favour he still retained, and the success of his effort to cleanse the Carnival celebrations of their old licence, Savonarola was fully aware of the increasing danger of the position in which he stood. Alexander VI. was still bent on his policy of coercing or enticing Florence to abandon the alliance with France, and he, as the outstanding obstacle to that policy, was constantly menaced. His central interest, however, was the revival of true religion in Florence and throughout the land; and his soul was pained by the deepening horror of the immoralities and vices going on at Rome, which were spreading a defiling influence far and near. The scandalous doings of the Borgia family, in which the Pope had his own guilty share, were absolutely crippling the spiritual power of the Church and covering religion with contempt. Savonarola could not hold his peace. Whatever the consequences, he felt impelled to utter his protest in the name of God; and, standing in the Cathedral pulpit in Lent, while avoiding any personal attack upon the Pope, he declaimed against the lusts, sensualities, and crimes which were more and more disgracing the Papal Court, and enlarged on the need for

the Church's purification. He avowed his determination to rouse the Christian world against the evil of which Rome was the seat. "I am here," he said, "because the Lord appointed me to this place, and I await His call, but then will I send forth a mighty cry that shall resound throughout Christendom, and make the corpse of the Church to tremble even as trembled the body of Lazarus at the voice of our Lord." Excommunication might be decreed, but he did not fear it; he would have his own answer to give which would amaze the world. In striving to restore religion to its purity and power, he was prepared for a worse fate than excommunication. "O Lord, I seek only Thy cross, . . . let me give my blood for Thee, even as Thou gavest Thine for me."

In fact, excommunication appeared now only an incident in the stern conflict which he felt under an imperative obligation to carry on to its utmost issues. The cause of religion and righteousness was jeopardised by the notorious iniquities in which the Pope and his family were steeped, and the whole moral passion of Savonarola's soul was stirred. Though a martyr's death should be the penalty, he could make no compromise at a juncture so momentous. He would kindle the indignation of Europe, and put forth a supreme effort to stem the tide of pollution which was flowing from the metropolis of Christendom. That it was a desperate struggle he knew; he had a clear comprehension of the malignant forces which would be aroused against himself; but an inward constraint was upon him to go forward, and, once committed, there could be no turning back.

The Pope was highly enraged at those Lent fulmina-

tions, which were duly retailed to him in factiously exaggerated reports. Alexander VI. was already strongly incensed against Savonarola on account of his cool and resolute resistance to the order requiring the union of San Marco's and the convents associated with it to the newly-created Tusco-Roman Congregation, of which Cardinal Caraffa, an old friend and well-wisher, had been appointed as head. For the moment, however, Alexander, always resourceful in statecraft, disguised his irritation, and adopted an adroit means of circumventing the Florentine Friar. He secretly appealed to the self-interest of the Florentines by offering to obtain for them the restoration of Pisa, provided they would show themselves "good Italians," break their alliance with France, and join the Holy League. Attractive as the proposal seemed, the Florentines had their doubts as to its sincerity. Their special envoy to Rome, Ser Alessandro Bracci, was instructed to tell the Pope that while the Florentines were not only "good" but "excellent Italians," and had no wish to injure any Italian power, they could not abandon their alliance with France. To this he received the sarcastic reply, "Sir Secretary, you are as fat as Ourself, but you have come on a lean mission; and if you have nothing else to say, you may be gone." Then, after asserting his belief that the obstinacy of the Florentines was due to faith in the prophecies of their "chattering friar," Alexander broadly hinted a threat of forcing Florence into submission and creating a revolution in its affairs.

The threat was soon put into execution. Alexander gave encouragement to Piero de Medici, who had been hanging on at Rome and leading a loose, spendthrift

life, to make another attempt on Florence and recover his place there. The state of parties in the city at the time appeared to favour the enterprise. The younger members of the aristocratic families had at once taken advantage of Valori's new law, reducing the age for admission to the Great Council, and had thrown their weight into the political scale. There had happened also a certain fluctuation of feeling, such as is witnessed not infrequently in connection with the public life of a community—a distinct swerving of opinion, an ebb of popular interest, by which the balance of parties is unexpectedly reversed. And so it came about that when Valori's two months' term of office expired and a new Signory was elected for March and April, the representatives of the Arrabbiati and Medici together were in the majority, and chose an influential and trusted adherent of the Medici cause, Bernardo del Nero, for the post of Gonfaloniere. This was a blow to Savonarola, and a triumph for his foes; to Piero de Medici it furnished an opportunity for his personal designs, which he promptly proceeded to turn to account, with the Pope's blessing and support to aid him. Cheered on by a message from his partisans in Florence, Piero mustered a force of thirteen hundred men, and by rapid marches was soon close to the city gates. The alarm, however, had been given, and the friends of liberal government were on their guard and prepared. The gates were fortified with cannon, and kept sternly closed, and even Bernardo del Nero, who had meanwhile sent an urgent warning to Piero to delay his attack for the time, was constrained by the current of popular sentiment to put on an appearance of enthusiasm for the city's defence. For a whole day Piero

waited with his troops outside the walls, but no sign of welcome or of co-operation came from his faction within; and, having no spirit to run desperate risks, he retired in discomfiture, the victim of delusive promises and false hopes, but leaving behind him in Florence itself a ferment of suspicions and fears and embittered party feeling destined to cause grave social and political trouble ere long.

The Medicean cause was thus for the moment discredited. The Pope disowned all connection with Piero. The ever-active Arrabbiati, seizing their advantage, so worked on the popular unrest as to gain the ascendancy at the next election, and at the beginning of May 1497 a Signory avowedly hostile to Savonarola was placed in power. The effect was soon visible in riotous outbreaks and in the renewal of those licentious scenes which had now for a considerable period been suppressed. It was patent in many ways that a reaction against Savonarola's moral domination had begun. His followers were still a large and powerful body, and by their simple dress and devout demeanour the Piagnoni could everywhere be recognised. All lovers of order and good government were also on his side, and honoured him for his political capacity, his public spirit, and his unblemished purity of life. But the sovereignty he had wielded over the manners, habits, and thoughts of the people was gradually slipping from his grasp. In the minds of many, a keen disappointment had been caused by the failure of his predictions regarding the great things to be accomplished by Charles VIII., and accordingly their faith in the preacher, whom they had once so ardently revered as a prophet of the Lord, was losing its hold.

Owing partly to the impaired condition of his health, and partly to the delicacy of his position at this particular stage of his controversy with Rome, Savonarola appeared less frequently than usual in the pulpit. The arguments which he was obliged to employ in defending himself against his traducers, and in vindicating his attitude towards the Pope and his disobedience to the mandate regarding the Tusco-Roman Congregation, robbed his preaching of its wonted directness and freedom. He was hampered by the tone of self-justification which the situation was more and more forcing upon him, and which largely coloured his sermons during this period. Moreover, the Pope's further action was still a matter of suspense; and while the position was complicated and liable to misconstruction in the eyes of the world, he felt that it was only under some special call or distinct necessity that he could serve any good end by speaking in public. The time for open defiance had not yet come.

In consequence, perhaps, of this greater seclusion and rarer appearance in the pulpit, the decline of Savonarola's power more readily set in. Nevertheless, from the first the causes of that decline must have been present, although for a while their operation was arrested by the subduing force of so lofty and masterful a personality. Against the enforcement by formal enactments and prohibitions of a high-pitched and austere morality upon a people neither by native temperament nor by training prepared for it, the reaction was sure, sooner or later, to come. Its coming was now evident in the accession to political influence of the great Friar's opponents, and in the relaxed decorum

of life and conduct generally by which that circumstance was followed.

Savonarola was made the object of an insulting and villainously-purposed demonstration. It had been announced that he was to preach on Ascension Day, the 4th of May, before an order of the Signory prohibiting sermons in any of the churches should come into force—an order professedly prompted by anxiety to prevent the spread of the plague which was threatening the city. It was his last chance, for a time at least, of addressing the people, and he resolved to embrace it. During the previous night the Compagnacci, who, under their insolent leader, Dolfo Spini, were gaining courage to pursue their lawless courses, managed to steal into the Cathedral, where they befouled the pulpit with filth, spread the raw skin of an ass over it, and ran nails with their points upwards into the board on which he was wont to strike his hands in the excitement of speaking. But the outrage was discovered in good time, and all traces of it cleared away; and the preacher's enemies had the mortification of seeing him ascend and begin his discourse with perfect calmness. It was a discourse on the power of faith, intended to encourage the pious in meeting the trying times for religion and social well-being which evidently were at hand. Suddenly there was a crash; an alms-box had been broken off from its place on the wall and flung on the floor. It was the doing of the graceless young aristocrats, who were not to be baffled in their evil-minded designs. A panic seized the congregation; there was a wild rush for the doors, and a scene of frantic confusion ensued. Friends and foes alike made a dash for the pulpit, the one to defend the

preacher, the other to assail him. Savonarola remained bent over the desk in silent prayer, and not till the tumult had so far subsided did he descend and accept the protection of his loyal adherents, who now, armed with swords and spears, escorted him with shouts of *Viva Cristo* and brandishing of weapons to his convent gate.

This scandalous scene was noised abroad and became the talk of the day all over Italy. The result in Florence was an edict of the Signory, positively forbidding friars of any kind to preach without their permission, while the wooden galleries provided for Savonarola's immense audiences were all removed. There was even a suggestion mooted that the preservation of the public peace required that Savonarola himself should be exiled, although—and this is significant of the change of feeling which had occurred—the real authors of the Cathedral disturbance were allowed to go unpunished. At Rome the news of the tumult on Ascension Day hastened the Pope's action in taking his long contemplated step and signing the Brief of Excommunication. That former discomfited rival, Fra Mariano, it seems, had been enviously busy in instigating Alexander to move in this direction, and to crush the man whom he vilified as "the perdition of the Florentine people." Other adversaries also used their influence for the same end, and on 13th May the formidable document was issued. It was a remarkable production. Describing Savonarola as "a certain Fra Girolamo," who was reported to be Vicar of San Marco in Florence, and who had sown abroad pernicious doctrine to the scandal and ruin of simple souls, it proceeded to state that he

had been commanded in a Brief to desist from preaching, and come to Rome to obtain pardon for his errors. He had, however, declined to obey; yet in the hope that he would be converted by clemency, his excuses had been accepted and his disobedience treated with gracious forbearance. That hope had been disappointed, and accordingly another Brief had been issued, ordaining that he should unite his convent with the new Tusco-Roman Congregation. Still he had persisted in his obstinacy, setting the ordinance at nought and disregarding the ecclesiastical censures which he had thereby incurred. "Wherefore we command you, on all festivals, and in presence of the people, to declare the said Fra Girolamo excommunicate, and to be held as such by all men, for his failure to obey our admonitions and commands. Moreover, all persons whatsoever are to be warned that they are to avoid him as excommunicated and suspected of heresy, under pain of the same penalty."

Ere receiving this Brief, but clearly apprehensive that the blow was impending, Savonarola wrote a letter to the Pope, complaining that heed had been given only to the false accusations of his enemies, while the evidence in disproof of those accusations had been ignored. He had never, he protested, made any personal attack upon the Pope as in former days he had had to rebuke Fra Mariano for doing. He was always ready to submit himself to the judgment of the Church, and preached no other doctrine than that of the Holy Fathers, as would soon be proved to the whole world in his forthcoming work, *The Triumph of the Cross*. If all human help should fail him, he will trust in God.

It appears from subsequent correspondence between the Florentine envoys in Rome and the Council of Ten, that this letter had a softening effect on Alexander VI., and moved him to regret that he had signed the Brief. But it came too late. The judgment had been pronounced and the document conveying it despatched before the letter itself was penned.

From various causes the Brief of Excommunication was not delivered in Florence till the 18th of June. It was addressed to the convents of Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, Santo Spirito, the Badia, and the Annunziata; and in the churches attached to these houses it was solemnly read out at night to the assembled monks, amid the glimmer of candles and the occasional tinkle of bells. When the last word was reached, the lights were suddenly extinguished, leaving the listeners to retire in silence and gloom.

Immediately copies of the document were posted up at the church doors, and all Florence was moved by the publication of the awful sentence against a man who had filled so large a place in the thoughts and life of the citizens. The Piagnoni and all lovers of order were thrown into grief; the Arrabbiati were exultant — the great obstacle to their hopes of converting the Republic into an aristocratic oligarchy was now struck down. In monastic and clerical circles the denouncer of ecclesiastical delinquencies and all his brethren at San Marco were haughtily ostracised. Very soon, moreover, the bonds of moral restraint were thrown off. The wild and profligate elements in the population broke loose, and the Compagnacci led the way in headstrong profanity.

Riotousness and revelry again disturbed the streets at night; vice and wantonness appeared in open day; the taverns were once more filled; there was a widespread return to extravagance and frivolity. Now that the potent voice which had so long kept the immoral tendencies of men under control was condemned to silence, there was a rebound to the old recklessness and licence.

In the meantime Savonarola in his own way, and his influential sympathisers in theirs, were endeavouring to meet the stroke dealt by the Papal Brief. He wrote in great haste an *Epistle against the Surreptitious Excommunication*, addressed not to the Pope, but to "all Christians, beloved of God." In that letter he reasserted his mission as God's messenger to announce the tribulations which were to fall on Italy, and especially on Rome, for the removal of evils and the renovation of the Church; and then he proceeded to argue that the excommunication was invalid because it was based on misrepresentations, and put forth with an evil intention in opposition to God and the truth. He had never, he affirmed, been disobedient to the Holy Roman Church, nor to the Pope, nor to any Superior of his, down to that present hour. "For we ought to obey our Superior in so far as he holds the place of God; but he does not hold the place of God, and is not our Superior, when he commands what is contrary to God. Accordingly, it has happened that in such a case as this I have not obeyed, knowing that neither God nor the Church wishes me to obey in things that are contrary to their commands." In closing he said that if his arguments were not listened to and further steps

were taken against him, he would make the truth known to all the world in such a fashion that no one should be able to gainsay it. He followed this up by a second letter, *Against the Sentence of Excommunication*, dealing with the subject specially in the light of the views of the leading authorities on ecclesiastical law, and particularly quoting Gerson's teaching that to yield unqualified submission to an unjust sentence would be to show the patience of an ass and the foolish timidity of a hare; that it is perfectly lawful to appeal from the Pope to a General Council; and that in many cases a Pope may be disobeyed when he scandalously abuses his power to an evil end.

The cogency of this reasoning has been subjected to a searching criticism by Roman Catholic writers, and the criticisms all lead to the same conclusion. When full credit has been given to the sincerity of Savonarola's motives, and when the value of his work for the reform of morals has been recognised, he is still pronounced by those writers as flagrantly at fault for his insubordination in refusing acquiescence to the commands of his ecclesiastical superior. His attitude in adhering to his own honest conviction of right and ignoring the decrees of the Pope on the ground of their alleged injustice, is condemned as unwarrantable presumption. It is the old and endless controversy between the absolute authority claimed by the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and the natural rights asserted on behalf of the human soul and conscience on the other—a hopeless and irreconcilable antagonism. So long as a religious corporation, skilfully organised and welded

together, insists on the ordinances of its official head being received, outwardly at least, with unqualified submission, and so long as the spirit of man, facing the vital questions of right and wrong, dares to speak according to its own judgment and act on its own warrant, the conflict will continue; and no logic of argument, nothing but the logic of events and the slow progress of the world's enlightenment, will avail for its settlement. The demands of absolutism are held as completely above reason; they are bound up with so many vested interests, and are so essential to the maintenance of the old traditional power and dazzling prestige and glory, that there is no prospect of their ever being abated until the soul's deep instincts for freedom awake to strength and gather courage to defy them.

# CHAPTER XIX

## Six Months of Silence

The plague had broken out and was working its ravages in Florence when Savonarola found himself placed under ban by the excommunicatory Brief. People were hurrying out of the city and seeking safety in the purer atmosphere of the country hamlets and villages. The crowded condition of San Marco's was a source of anxiety. Considering the large number who had joined the brotherhood through the attraction of its Prior's fame and gifts, there was reason to fear a heavy amount of suffering and mortality should the terrible malady seize on a community so closely pent up together. Savonarola met the emergency with that practical wisdom and bold decision which he so often displayed. He sent away the novices and younger friars to places where the contagion was less likely to reach them, and then devoted himself to the edification of the brethren left behind and to the service of the sick. Friends pleaded with him to flee, and some of his wealthier adherents offered him in their own villas a secure retreat from the danger. But whatever faults might be detected in him, he never failed to prove that he had a heart too big, sound, and true to yield to personal fear. He

remained with steadfast resolve at his post of duty. His usefulness, however, at that time of distress was circumscribed by the ecclesiastical interdict resting upon him. Still the gates of his convent were open to all who might resort to him for comfort, and in those weeks of trouble and dread, when fifty or sixty were dying in a day in the pestilence-stricken city, and the burden of a great awe and sorrow lay on people's minds, there were many who found in his ready sympathy and gracious counsels a rich sustaining strength. And while in this way he cheered the sad and anxious around him in Florence itself, he did not forget those friends at a distance who were involved in the severe strain and concern caused by the general calamity. To not a few of them he wrote letters of encouragement, calming their fears, and exhorting them to trust in God. He wrote also to his own family at Ferrara, assuring them of the safety of his brother Fra Maurelio, who had for some time been associated with him as a member of the San Marco brotherhood, and expressing a tenderness of affection still unchilled by all the absorbing interests of his life and all his experience of fame and power.

One letter belonging to this period possesses a peculiar importance. It was not occasioned, however, by the troubles connected with the plague, but by a tragical event which threw into blacker relief than ever the horrors and crimes which were bringing on Rome the scorn of the world. On the 14th of June, the Pope's eldest son, Piero Borgia, Duke of Gandia, was foully done to death and his body flung into the Tiber, from which it was dragged out two days later. Suspicion fell on several distinguished members of the

Papal Court, and among others on the notorious Cæsar Borgia, the murdered man's own brother; but the police completely failed in discovering the actual perpetrator of the deed, although the investigations revealed an appalling amount of base jealousy and treachery in the highest quarters. The consternation and distress in the Papal palace were unexampled. The Pope was overwhelmed with grief, a grief that threatened to rend his heart in sunder. As the Venetian Ambassador in one of his despatches declared, "The wild wail of the bereaved old man in the Castle of St. Angelo was heard in the streets around." He shut himself up in his room, and for four days neither ate nor drank, nor had a moment's sleep. This outburst of grief was followed by a spasm of remorse. Alexander took the blow as a visitation from God and a warning to him to return from the error of his ways. He made good resolutions, and, summoning a Consistory, he professed his determination to enter on a real effort of improvement both in his own life and in the Church. He was to renounce all favouritism in the disposal of ecclesiastical benefices; he was to begin the reform in himself, in his family, and his court, and so proceed through all the ranks of the Church till the whole work should be accomplished. And as a practical proof of the sincerity of his intentions, he appointed six cardinals on the spot to constitute the Commission that should carry the reform into effect.

When this startling news reached Florence, Savonarola took up his pen and addressed a letter of condolence to the afflicted and penitent Pontiff under whose terrible anathema he now lay. He probably judged

that a time when the old man's mind would be open to sacred impressions, and in conciliatory but earnest terms he urged on him the power and value of faith as a source of strength in adversity. "Blessed is he who is called to this gift of faith, without which no one can have peace. Let your Holiness respond to this blessed call, so that soon your mourning may be turned into joy." He, the writer, was himself in suffering for the sake of a work which he had at heart, and he pleaded with the bereaved father to help forward that work and not give ear to the wicked; then would the Lord bestow on him the oil of gladness for the spirit of grief. He had written, he protested, under the prompting of charity and in all humility, desiring that his Holiness might find comfort in God. "May He console you in your tribulation."

This letter was taken in good part, and tended to further the exertions which the authorities of Florence were making through their envoys at Rome to induce the Pope to withdraw the sentence of excommunication. Alexander, indeed, was so far moved by the influences brought to bear upon him, that he delegated the consideration of Savonarola's case to the Commission of Reform which he had just recently appointed. Petitions and counter-petitions went up to Rome from Florence. The Arrabbiati, on their side, renewed their old accusations, and pressed for a confirmation of the Papal decree. On the other hand, the brethren of San Marco pleaded earnestly for its removal, and enlarged on the purity of their Prior's doctrines and the lofty saintliness of his life; while one influential petition, signed by three hundred and sixty-three leading citizens, whom the plague had not yet driven away, was

equally strong in its testimony in Savonarola's favour. The new Signory also, which this time was friendly, sent a letter to the Pope, laying stress on the eminent virtues of the condemned Friar, the wonderful fruits of his moral reformation, and the holy manner in which he lived.

Weeks passed; the plague gradually abated; fugitive citizens returned to their homes, and Florence resumed its usual routine; but there was no sign of the recall of the excommunication. Suddenly in August a whirlwind of agitation was raised, by the disclosure of hitherto unknown facts respecting the attempted surprise of the city by Piero de Medici a few months before. Through the arrest of an outlawed Medicean partisan, Lamberto dell' Antella, evidence came to light which fastened the blame of that plot on five citizens of great social distinction, whose complicity had not previously been suspected. There were Niccolo Ridolfi and Lorenzo Tornabuoni, both related to the Medici family. Then there were Giovanni Cambi and Gionozzo Pucci, the one a rich merchant, and the other a youth of noble birth and great talent. But the most striking figure of all was the venerable Bernardo del Nero, a man of high character and reputation, and now seventy-five years of age, who had been Gonfaloniere at the time when the move was made to put the traitorous scheme into execution. It was pleaded on his behalf that his only offence was that he had known of the conspiracy and had not disclosed it. On the other hand, it was argued that such conduct in the chief of the State was criminal in its turpitude.

In view of the powerful connections of the accused,

the case was found most embarrassing to deal with, and the various bodies of officials shifted the responsibility of condemnation from one to another. The Council of the Eight threw on the Signory the task of deciding; the Signory referred judgment to a mixed assembly, first of twenty, then of one hundred and thirty-six representative citizens; and in the last resort the Eight were compelled to pronounce the verdict. When the mixed tribunal of twenty passed a sentence of guilty, an appeal to the Greater Council was offered, but declined. After the final condemnation came, however, the right of appeal was resolutely claimed, and over this claim there was fierce and protracted debate in the Signory, giving rise to dissensions and tumults highly dangerous to the welfare and safety of the city; for outside, popular indignation against the traitors was strong. Four of the Signory were in favour of the appeal being granted, five against it; and it seemed as if a clear and emphatic decision was hopeless, till Francesco Valori, with his impetuous energy, stepped forward in burning wrath to the table, and, seizing the ballot-box, cried out, "Let justice at once be done," and so overpowered the dissentient members by his denunciation of the accused, that they gave their votes for the sentence of death. The condemned men were granted but little time to prepare for their tragic end. An attempt by their friends to evoke compassion for them, by bringing them out barefooted and in their chains to the Council hall, entirely failed in its purpose, and at two o'clock in the morning, in the courtyard of the Bargello, they were led to the block and bowed their heads to the axe of the executioner.

To all these incidents and the commotion created by them it cannot be supposed that Savonarola was indifferent. His feelings with regard to the men charged with treason must have been distinctly adverse as the evidence of their guilt became revealed. The free, self-governing Republic was dear to his heart; of the veiled despotism of the Medici régime he had an invincible abhorrence, and he dreaded the possibility of its restoration. With such sentiments so deeply rooted, it was not to be expected that he would look with aught but reprobation on those conspirators by whose conduct the Republic had been placed in jeopardy. He has been censured for not interposing in favour of mercy, and especially for not exerting his influence to procure for the unhappy men the privilege of appeal to the Greater Council. It must be remembered, however, that the appeal to the Greater Council was a measure passed contrary to his personal advice and wishes. George Eliot has failed to give due weight to this consideration, and in her *Romola* she has presented Savonarola's conduct in the matter in a dubious light, as if he had been seriously at fault in not exerting his power to secure for the condemned men the very right of appeal which had been established through his instrumentality. It is necessary to recall the fact that he had never advocated a right of appeal to the Greater Council. The appeal which he did advocate, but which, greatly to his disappointment, was not carried, was an appeal to a more limited and, as he believed, more intelligent and deliberative tribunal; and it would therefore have been against his better judgment to submit a case involving the question of life or death to the larger assembly, where the heat of party prejudice

and feeling might be apt to sway the decision. Besides, the case had actually been tried before the very kind of court which accorded best with his ideas, when it was submitted to the mixed tribunal of one hundred and thirty-six representative citizens; and consequently, in his view, all that justice required had been done. As to the assertion that he ought to have put in a plea for mercy, it is sufficient answer to point out the circumstance that the pulpit was closed to him now, and that he was debarred from any suitable opportunity of moving the public mind, while the influential men among his followers, like Valori and others, who were taking a prominent part in public work, were too absorbingly intent on combating the designs of opposing factions, and safeguarding what they deemed the interests of free government, to give much heed to any such plea. Savonarola was no longer the supreme director of the city's political business. He was still the popular idol, the outstanding figure that gave to Florence its proud and far-extending renown, although the Pope's ban and the Signory's hesitating attitude on account of it were shaking the old enthusiastic confidence among certain sections of the community. But the place he had held in the politics of Florence was now filled by men more directly concerned with political life. At a hazardous emergency, when the city was menaced with anarchy, and there was no public man strong and wise enough to take the helm and guide the State, he, by his masterly gifts and cultured sagacity, had met the need of the hour, and almost dictated the constitution of the revived Republic. The need had passed; the constitution framed under his advice was in full working order; the political activity

of the commonwealth could go on without his personal leadership; and—weightiest fact of all, perhaps—the very spirit of freedom which he had kindled and called to life was learning to act on its own impulse, and growing disposed to claim its own independence in the administration of affairs. Those, therefore, who blame him for not interfering in behalf of the condemned conspirators fail to make due allowance for all the facts of the situation at that particular crisis.

One result of the blow given to the plotters against the Republic was the return to supremacy of Savonarola's friends, the Piagnoni. The various Signories elected during the remainder of this year 1497 were all distinctly on his side. They put forth every effort to obtain the revocation of the Papal censure. It was felt to be a loss to the city, that the mighty voice which had stirred men to higher aims and touched the finer chords of their nature by its eloquent calls to faith and godliness, should be doomed so long to silence. It was felt also that the friction with Rome into which Florence was drawn by reason of the excommunication was detrimental to its peace and general prosperity. While the negotiations of the Signory were proceeding, an offer was made to Savonarola himself which showed that the Holy Father was disposed to yield. He was given to understand, through the Cardinal of Siena, that on payment of five thousand crowns to a certain creditor of the latter dignitary, the ban would be removed. This was an indirect assurance that full absolution might be purchased, but Savonarola rejected the proposal, believing, as he said, in writing to a friend, that he would be far more deeply banned were he to accept absolution at such a price.

As the period of silence lengthened out, the evidences of Savonarola's literary activity began to appear. Several pamphlets and tractates issued from his pen—*The Lamentation of the Bride of Christ, The Seven Steps of the Spiritual Life of St. Bonaventura, On the Exercise of Charity,* and the finely-written *Epistle to Sisters of the Third Order of St. Dominic.* It was then also that he published the elaborate theological treatise which for many months had engaged his time and thought, *The Triumph of the Cross.* It is in this work that we find the most convincing proofs of Savonarola's learning and intellectual power. It brings into view his clear and easy command of the scholastic, and also of the most advanced philosophic, knowledge of his age. Its style, which presents a marked contrast to that of his sermons, is calm, carefully logical, dispassionate. The design of the book is to establish on strictly rational grounds the Divine origin and truth of Christianity as a religion whose doctrines, though above the power of reason to discover, are yet in perfect harmony with reason when revealed. It is here that we find its originality. The method adopted is a decided departure from the form of argument usually followed up to that day, and is more in keeping with the demands of the modern spirit. "In this book," it is said in the Introduction, "we wish to proceed only by reasonings; we shall invoke no authority, but act as if it were only necessary to believe our own reason and experience; for all men are compelled, under pain of folly, to consent to natural reason." On the lines thus laid down Savonarola proceeds to discourse in the first book on the existence and attributes of God; in the second, on the truth and excellence of the

Christian religion; in the third, on the particular Christian doctrines and the principles of Christian morality and the sacraments; in the fourth and last, on the superiority of Christianity to all other forms of faith; and here he most distinctly expresses the opinion, which ought to have been sufficient to clear away all suspicion of heresy, that the chair of St. Peter is the centre of the Roman Church, and that whoever departs from the unity and doctrines of the Roman Church unquestionably departs from Christ. The whole argument of the work is summed up in these eloquent words: "If we consider the power that Jesus Christ has employed to surmount so many gods, emperors, kings, tyrants, philosophers, and heretics; to subjugate without arms, without riches, without help of human wisdom, so many barbarous nations; if we represent to ourselves the faith, constancy, and firmness of so many saints martyred for the Christian faith; the admirable wisdom used by Jesus Christ to illuminate in so short a time the whole world with the splendours of truth, and to purify it from the pollution of so many crimes and errors; if we add to all this, the consideration of His immense kindness, by means of which He has attracted to His love an infinite number of men, who, not content with despising perishable things, have wished to suffer death rather than yield a single iota of their faith—we shall be compelled to confess the divinity of Christianity. What man, what god, other than Jesus Christ, has ever accomplished anything like it? . . . The philosophers did not sufficiently comprehend the true end of life; the astrologers lost themselves in the midst of a thousand superstitions; the idolaters had no truth nor

modesty; the Jews are confounded by their own prophets, and by the captivity to which they are now reduced; the heretics bear in their many divisions the proof of their errors; Mahometanism falls before the attack of a simple philosophy; Christianity alone remains, confirmed and ratified by the double power and double light of nature and grace—by the holy life of Christians—by wisdom, works, and miracles, which nourish the mind: therefore it is Divine. . . . If, then, we have not lost all our understanding, we must believe that the faith of Jesus Christ is the true faith; that there is another life where we shall appear in person before the tribunal of that formidable Judge, who will place the wicked on His left hand, in torments, like impure goats, and the good on His right hand, in felicity, like sacred sheep, and will give them the privilege of seeing God face to face—God Triune and One, immense, ineffable—in whom the saints will eternally possess all blessedness, by the grace of the invincible and triumphant Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be honour, power, empire, and glory, through ages of ages. Amen."

# CHAPTER XX

## The Pope Defied

In vain the Signory interceded and Savonarola waited; Alexander VI. gave no indication of cancelling the excommunicatory Brief. His spasm of compunction had subsided. He did not possess the moral strength to abandon his licentious habits. His penitential resolves, adopted in a moment of anguish and sorrow, had passed away and were forgotten, and he was once more following his old course of arrogant grasping, self-indulgence, and wily intrigue. He could no longer accuse Savonarola of schism or heresy. *The Triumph of the Cross,* with its powerful defence of the unity and the doctrines of the Church, removed all ground for such a charge. The Commission of Cardinals also, to whom his case had been referred, had pronounced the book unimpeachable in its orthodoxy. Yet the very presence of the strong-minded Friar in Florence was a danger to the policy on which Alexander was bent. He made overtures to the Signory to have Savonarola sent to Rome, but as they could not see their way to comply with the proposal, he stiffened himself into an attitude of relentless displeasure.

The magistrates felt their strained relations with the Pope severely trying. There was a large amount

of uneasiness and apprehension, for the neighbouring Italian powers were waiting for their opportunity to take Florence at a disadvantage, and those responsible for the public safety were in anxious dread of the political complications which might at any moment arise. Moreover, the devout among the inhabitants, deprived of the inspiring ministrations of their favourite preacher, were depressed and dissatisfied. The moral condition of the city was going from bad to worse. Since the withdrawal of Savonarola's restraining influence, the increase of vice and recklessness had become glaring, and as the later months of 1497 wore on, the situation grew more intolerable.

At last, on Christmas Day, Savonarola took a bold and decisive step. He three times publicly administered the Mass at San Marco, and led a solemn procession through the cloisters. The magistrates soon displayed their sympathy with him in this act of defiance, by going on the feast of the Epiphany to present offerings in San Marco Church, and by kissing the hand of Savonarola as he stood at the high altar. Ere many weeks elapsed, arrangements were made, with the full approval of the Signory, for his reappearance in the pulpit of the Duomo, and to provide for the crowds expected the wooden galleries were put up once more. The Archbishop's vicar attempted to prevent his preaching, by issuing a mandate forbidding all from attending, on the pain of sharing in the sentence of excommunication, and of being cut off from the sacraments and Christian burial; but the Signory made short work of this proclamation, and threatened to declare the vicar a rebel unless it was at once withdrawn,

Accordingly, on Septuagesima Sunday, 11th February 1498, Savonarola stood up in the old place, which had been to him as a veritable throne, and from which, by the power of his genius, eloquence, and personal character, he had so often swayed the lives and fortunes of the Florentine people. There, under the ægis of the secular, and in defiance of the ecclesiastical, power, he addressed an overflowing and anxiously expectant congregation, while the more virulent of his opponents vented their spite in noisy demonstrations on the piazza outside the building. As was to be anticipated, his discourse dealt largely with the decree of excommunication and the line of action respecting it which he had been constrained to pursue. In burning words he defended his disobedience. "The righteous prince or the good priest," he said, "is merely an instrument in the Lord's hands for the government of the people. But when the higher agency is withdrawn from the prince or priest, he is no longer an instrument, but a broken tool." Should the laws and commands issued be contrary to that which is the root and principle of all wisdom, namely, of godly living and charity, that was a proof that the higher agency was absent, and there was then in no wise an obligation to obey. This, he contended, was palpably the case with the sentence of excommunication, for no sooner was it published than the door was opened to every vice, there was a return to crime and profligacy, righteous living was struck down. "Therefore on him that giveth commands opposed to charity, which is the fulfilling of the law, *anathema sit.* Were such a command pronounced by an angel, even by the Virgin Mary herself, and all the saints (which is certainly im-

possible), *anathema sit.* And if any Pope hath ever spoken to a contrary effect from this, let him be declared excommunicate. I say not that such Pope hath ever existed; but if he hath existed he can have been no instrument of the Lord, but a broken tool. It is feared by some that, although this excommunication be powerless in heaven, it may have power in the Church. For me it is enough not to be interdicted by Christ. O my Lord, if I should seek to be absolved from this excommunication, let me be sent to hell; I should shrink from seeking absolution as from mortal sin."

Ere closing his sermon on that memorable day, he uttered some significant hints, which were greedily seized and kept in mind, as to the supernatural attestation which he believed his mission and claims would no doubt receive. "As yet," he said, "no miracle hath been forced from me; but when the time cometh the Lord will stretch forth His hand." On the two Sundays following he returned to the charge, and laboured to prove that a Pope may err in his judgments and sentences; that as his own doctrine was the doctrine of godly living, therefore it proceeded from God, whilst the excommunication was hostile to godly living, and therefore proceeded from the devil.

Thus the gauntlet was thrown down. Savonarola declared himself at war with the Pope. He had waited for months in the hope that Alexander would relent, and that the scandal of an open rupture with the Holy See might be avoided. Now that Alexander had shown himself implacable, he defied him. It was not, he pleaded, the defiance of mere insubordination. He did not rebel against ecclesiastical authority as such, but

only against the unworthy exercise of ecclesiastical authority by a notoriously unspiritual man, a man who, by the admission of all parties, had bought his official position by bribery, and had ever since disgraced it by the shameless immorality of his life. When such a man issued decrees based on false reports and calculated to promote ungodliness and the ruin of souls, as Alexander had done, he could not be the true representative of the Divine will. Nominal head of the Church though he was, it would in that case be mockery to suppose that he was speaking in the name of God.

Such was the ground on which Savonarola took his stand, although in his endeavour to vindicate it he was diverted again and again into distracting side issues and ingenious logical subtleties which impaired the force of his reasoning. His fundamental point clearly was—the right of the moral sense to challenge even lawfully constituted authority when the requirements of that authority contravene the plain dictates of justice. That right cannot be argued against. The Roman Catholic Church does not argue against it. She simply denies it. She flatly says that no such right exists, that the moral sense has no title to judge for itself in matters of religious duty, but must bow implicitly and without question to the commands laid upon it by the Church's official Superior. And even although that Superior be a man of corrupt morals and his decrees unjust, such a consideration cannot be accepted as an excuse for withholding obedience. As Dr. Pastor tersely puts it from the Roman Catholic point of view, "According to the teaching of the Church, an evil life cannot deprive the Pope or any other ecclesiastical

authority of his lawful jurisdiction;" and again, "Savonarola was bound to obey the Holy See, however it might be desecrated by such an occupant as Alexander VI."

Savonarola represents the revolt of the deepest moral instincts against such absolute subjection. His mind rebelled against the idea so emphatically maintained by ecclesiastics, that in the exercise of authority in the Church the moral quality of the official was a matter of indifference. He felt the impulse strong within him to assert the freedom of his own conscience. Freedom of conscience, however, was still to him only a profound and irrepressible sentiment; he had not grasped it, and apparently never did quite grasp it, as a clearly defined principle to which he could give articulate expression. Had he done so, he would most probably have hastened the revolution in religious thought and life which afterwards more slowly came to pass. Nevertheless, it was really the freedom of the conscience which was his underlying, impelling idea. He stood for the soul's indefeasible prerogative of testing by the light received from God the good or bad character, the justice or injustice, of the rules of action which are imposed upon its will. He was misguided, let it be confessed, extravagant, fanatical even, in some of the methods and arguments he employed, yet he strove to maintain a resolute protest on behalf of the essential dignity of conscience, and of its warrant to resist being crushed by the pressure of mere ecclesiastical officialism, when basely or wrongfully inspired; and by doing so he gave a decided stimulus to the progress of religion. For, indeed, it is by such resistance as he opposed to the unworthy exercise of

authority in the Church that the true authority is upheld. Implicit obedience to the unjust demands of authority may be insisted on for the sake of discipline and to save scandal, but were obedience to unjust demands to be generally rendered on such grounds, injustice would grow more rampant and tyrannical still through its very success, as the history of the world repeatedly shows. In fact, it is one of the most unmistakable lessons of history, that those are the best friends of the Church who, by reason of their very loyalty to its spiritual interests, set themselves courageously against all patent wrong-doing or corruption in the men who guide the Church's policy or wield control over its affairs.

The crowd of citizens listened with liveliest interest to those sermons of February 1498, in which their excommunicated Fra Girolamo sought to demonstrate the invalidity of the Papal decree; yet the anxiety and hesitation felt by many among them as to the position he thus assumed could not be concealed. They admired and trusted the man for his pure and blameless life; they honoured him highly for his gifts as a preacher, and for the good work he had done on behalf of religion and the public weal. Still, his defiance of the Holy See struck them with a feeling of pained uneasiness. That sense of the ghostly prestige of Papal authority in which they had been reared, and under which they had always lived, haunted and overshadowed their minds. It was impossible to escape from its spell. They were awed by the very thought of a man being banned by that august and mysterious power which ruled Christendom from Rome, and when they saw their own familiar Friar treating the solemn

ban when pronounced against himself with cool and lofty disdain, they were smitten with something akin to dismay, as if startled by an act of sacrilegious audacity. There can be little doubt that the impression thus produced tended to the withdrawal from Savonarola of much of the confidence and sympathy which hitherto he had so freely received. Men especially of a cautious temper dropped aside from the ranks of his supporters.

Evidently he was himself conscious of this impression, and the perception of it beguiled him into one of those lapses into fanaticism which marred the lofty simplicity of his life. In closing his third sermon in the Duomo, he announced his intention of making a daring challenge to prove the truth and sincerity of the course he had taken. On the last day of the Carnival he would say Mass in his convent church, and afterwards come out to the piazza with the Sacrament to give a solemn benediction. Then, he told his audience, they were to offer a special appeal to the Most High. "When I shall take the Sacrament in my hands, let every one earnestly pray that if this work proceeds not from the Lord, He may send upon me fire from heaven which shall then and there draw me down to hell."

It was only natural that such a challenge, answering as it did to the expectation of a miraculous proof of his mission which his broad hint a fortnight before had awakened, should attract an enormous concourse of the citizens. On the crowning day of the Carnival the wide Piazza of San Marco was densely thronged. All eyes were riveted, with wondering concern or impatient curiosity, on the temporary wooden pulpit raised outside the door of the convent church. Close round the pulpit were ranged the black-mantled

monks, chaunting their holy psalms, till Savonarola himself appeared, and knelt over the desk in silent prayer. Then, standing up, he addressed the solemnised and motionless throng, and called upon them to join in the prayer which he had asked them to offer to the Almighty. After a brief pause, he raised the consecrated Host, blessed the multitude as they bent low at the sign, and then uttered the astounding appeal, "O Lord, if my deeds be not sincere, if my words come not from Thee, strike me in this moment with Thy thunder." The mass of spectators waited and gazed with absorbed expectancy, but no bolt fell from the sky, no thunder boomed. But what was manifest to all was the look of rapt ecstasy and radiant confidence in the dark-robed Friar's face. To his devoted disciples that was as a gleam of light from heaven, betokening the Divine approval of their master and his work; and while their murmurs of pleased satisfaction rose and broke the stillness which had hitherto prevailed, he stepped down from the pulpit and retired into the church. That strange scene in front of San Marco was followed in the afternoon of the same day by a second Burning of the Vanities in the Piazza della Signoria. It was a repetition of the bonfire of the previous year, only with a taller pyramid, a larger and more valuable collection of doomed articles, and a more imposing procession, subjected, however, to insulting annoyance by the enraged and envious Compagnacci. When all were gathered round, the pile was duly fired, amid an outburst of chaunts and lauds, the blare of trumpets, and the clanging of bells; and as the flames mounted and roared in their work of destruction, the *Te Deum* was sung. Then there was another procession, first to

the front of the Duomo, to hand over the money collected to the Good Men of San Martino, and from there on to the Piazza of San Marco, where monks, clerics, and laymen joined hands in three separate rings, and to the music of hymns danced round a crucifix. So ended Savonarola's last Carnival, the last also of what may be reckoned the outward triumphs of his life.

For immediate popular effect, such demonstrations as those which characterised that Carnival day of 1498 may have been a success; yet for the strengthening of real power they were worse than useless. If Savonarola's challenge of the supernatural token was really a grasp to recover a waning sovereignty, the issue ere long showed it to be a dire mistake. Not a few sober-minded citizens, who cordially appreciated his public spirit and religious aims, were perplexed and staggered by what seemed to them the dangerous fanaticism of the morning scene enacted in front of San Marco. They were afraid, moreover, of the troublesome extremes to which the onslaught the Friar was instigating upon the "Vanities" might yet be carried. And so they quietly abstained henceforth from showing themselves on his side.

Soon the shadows darkened over that strong and daring spirit, and severely testing complications of circumstance gathered round him at a time when the balance of his disciplined practical sobriety was beginning to give way. The course he was following in openly defying the sentence of excommunication was bringing on Florence an embarrassment not likely to be long or willingly endured. While the Carnival celebrations were going on, the Pope was threatening

to lay the city under an Interdict should it continue to countenance the Friar in his rebellious obstinacy. That was a prospect which could only be contemplated with a feeling of dread; for the effect of the Interdict would inevitably be that Florence would be isolated, commercial intercourse with it on the part of other States would be forbidden on the pain of excommunication, the property of Florentine merchants in other cities would be confiscated, and there would be a general crippling of Florentine prosperity. Thus for Savonarola the situation was increasing in perplexity.

The sermons preached in the Cathedral against the validity of the excommunication had been printed one by one as soon as delivered, and circulated all over Italy and even in the lands of the north. In Rome they were read with blazing wrath, the flame of which the vindictive Fra Mariano da Gennazzano did his best to fan with his furious, coarsely-worded harangues. It was in vain that the Florentine ambassadors, Bracci and Bonsi, exercised their diplomatic skill in pleading the saintly character and useful life of the Fra Girolamo and the good intentions of the Signory. Alexander VI. would not be pacified. He despatched a Brief to the Signory conveying a clear threat of the Interdict unless the recalcitrant Friar—"the son of perdition," as it styled him—were sent at once to Rome, or at least put under guard and effectually silenced. This was accompanied by another Brief to the Canons of the Duomo, ordering them to prevent him from preaching in their church. Just about the time when those Briefs arrived, but before it was possible to consider the action to be taken respecting

them, Savonarola once more preached in the Cathedral. It was his last appearance there. He knew of the Briefs and their terms, and frankly spoke of them in his sermon. "They call me," he said, "the son of perdition. Let this be sent back for answer: 'The man whom you thus designate has neither harlots nor concubines, but gives himself up to preaching the faith of Christ. His spiritual children, those who listen to his doctrine, do not pass their time in the commission of crime; they live virtuously. This friar labours to exalt the Church, and you to destroy it.'" He was not to be daunted by the menaces of those who were responsible for the Church's corruption. "I will thunder in their ears," he declared, "after such a fashion that they will hear indeed. The time draws near to open the casket, and if we but *turn the key* there will come forth such a stench from the Roman sink that it will spread through all Christendom, and every one will perceive it."

This reference to the turning of the key was the first express hint he had ever given in public of the scheme which he had long been meditating, for calling a General Council with the object of investigating the title of Alexander VI. to hold the Papal chair, and of taking steps towards the reformation of the Church.

Bold and determined, however, as he still was, he judged it prudent to withdraw from the Cathedral pulpit and continue his sermons for the Lent season, which had now begun, in his own church of San Marco. His reason for this step was the fact that now it was not only his own personal position that was in question, but also the public interests of the city; and,

realising this, he decided to leave the newly-elected Signory, just entering on office, to deal with the message from Rome as far as possible unhampered by any action on his part which might aggravate the emergency.

## CHAPTER XXI

### Gathering Troubles

As it turned out, the majority of the new Signory on whom fell the duty of answering the Pope's command to compel Savonarola into submission belonged to the Arrabbiati faction. They shrank, however, from the odium of taking the line of action which their own party bias prompted, and called in the aid of the other official bodies in the State to share the responsibility of decision. A Pratica or conference was held, and the subject discussed, with the result that a resolution was passed against adopting so summary a course as that on which the Pope insisted. Against their will, therefore, the Signory were obliged to send to Alexander a letter which, in language at least, was distinctly in favour of Savonarola. They extolled his virtues and the good effect of his teaching, expressed their inability to face the popular disturbance sure to be aroused by any forcible attempt to suppress him, and begged his Holiness not to withhold his friendly regard and services from their city.

Meanwhile, Savonarola went on with his Lent sermons at San Marco, with the Book of Exodus as his theme. The church being too inconveniently crowded,

he was under the necessity of restricting the attendance on week-days to men only, with the exception of Saturday, which he set apart specially for women, who desired not to be altogether excluded from his ministrations. In those sermons, while enlarging often with great beauty, insight, and power on the beliefs and experiences of the spiritual life, he was drawn occasionally into arguments in his own defence, justifying his attitude towards the Pope, and maintaining the reality of his prophetic mission, as witnessed by the occurrence of events which, as all knew, he had been enabled to predict. It is pathetic to think of that strong voice, which was wont to speak out with the ring of full and masterly independence on the vital questions of faith and practical duty, reduced now so frequently to the apologetic, or even disputatious, tone of self-vindication.

But the development of the drama was hastening forward; the storm which had long been gathering was preparing to burst. The insincere, temporising letter of the Signory was received by the Pope with rage unmeasured. He wanted his orders obeyed; here was nothing but diplomatic evasion. He sent a Brief, dated 9th March, in which he told the Signory that their recommendations of the Fra Girolamo were beside the mark. He had never disapproved of his virtues or his preaching; what he condemned was his mischievous obstinacy in despising ecclesiastical censures, and he could tolerate his disobedience no longer. For the last time he warned and commanded them to send the Friar to Rome forthwith, or to confine him in strict seclusion within his monastery, until such time as he should yield submission and crave for

absolution. If that were not done, the Interdict would be issued, and the city would suffer.

Again a Pratica was summoned at Florence, and there was long and anxious deliberation over the demands of this menacing document. It was felt to be a critical moment, and the tension of feeling was high. Abundant testimonies were offered to the value of Savonarola's work in the city. Soderini and Valori were the chief speakers on the side of abstaining from further interference with his preaching. The other side was most ably and dexterously argued by Guid' Antonio Vespucci, the eminent lawyer who represented the views of the aristocratic party. The suspension of Savonarola's ministries he professed to deplore as a spiritual deprivation to the citizens; but over against that result he pictured the disastrous consequences to Florence—the ruin of commerce, and the loss of the hope of recovering Pisa—which an offence to the Pope would undoubtedly entail. It was not positively certain, he said, whether Fra Girolamo held a direct commission from God, but it was certain that the Pope had his power from God, and therefore it was wiser to render obedience. Should any wrong be committed by complying with the mandate from Rome, it was the Pope who was responsible, and not they.

Vespucci's line of reasoning obviously harmonised with the prevailing mood of the assembly. As the debate proceeded, it became increasingly apparent that the question of the treatment to be dealt out to Savonarola was being discussed, not in the light of what was due to the Friar himself and to the cause of justice and holy living which he, confessedly, represented, but in the light of what was most expedient

for the city's material prosperity. The high note of loyalty to right—which might have stirred men's hearts and consciences to heroic daring, and made the occasion gloriously memorable in history—was never sounded. Those who might have been expected to sound it—the men who had been most powerfully moved by Savonarola's teaching—were too perplexed by the difficulty of the situation, and probably also were unable to throw off their lingering superstitious terror of the baleful effects which a Papal anathema might bring upon themselves and their city.

The decision was referred to a select committee, who, on the 17th of March, came to the conclusion that Savonarola should be "persuaded" to cease from preaching, the persuasion, however, being intended to have all the force of a prohibitive command. This was communicated by the Council of Ten to Rome through Bonsi, the envoy there, with an anxious expression of the hope that his Holiness would be satisfied with what had been done, and would in his goodness restore to the citizens their now silenced spiritual instructor, of whose ministrations they were grieved to be deprived.

Ere this reply was despatched, Savonarola had himself addressed a letter to the Pope, in which he displayed the fearless resolution of his mind in confronting the decision on his case, however unfavourable. In seeking as a good Christian to defend the faith and purify morals, he averred, he had met with nothing but trials and tribulations. He told Alexander that he had placed his hope in him, only to find that his Holiness had put it in the power of his enemies, like savage wolves, to wreak their cruelty upon him. No hearing had been given to the reasons he had advanced in proof

of his doctrines, his personal innocence, his submission to the Church. Henceforth he would turn for hope to Him who chooses the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and who, as he believed, would help him to maintain the truth of the cause for which he suffered, and inflict just punishment on those who persecuted him and strove to hinder his work. "As for myself," he said in conclusion, "I seek no glory of this world, but I wait for and desire death. Let your Holiness delay no longer, but take heed to your own salvation."

On the evening of the very day on which the resolution was passed, Savonarola received the order of the Signory forbidding him to preach. He had just held his Saturday service for women, and had spoken in terms of gracious tenderness which brought tears to every eye. On the day following, the 18th of March, the third Sunday in Lent, he mounted the pulpit of San Marco once more, and delivered his last sermon. He had not sought, he protested, to weaken the Roman Church, but rather to augment its strength. Yet he would not be subject to the powers of hell, and all power that is opposed to good is not of God, but of the devil. Oftentimes he had resolved to abstain from acting on the things revealed to him, but the word of the Lord had been within him as a consuming fire in his bones and in his heart, and he had not been able to restrain it, because he felt himself all aflame with the spirit of God. The order of the Signory had come, "but," he said, "we will obtain by our supplications that which we may not obtain by sermons; and we exhort all good men to do likewise. O Lord, I pray Thee, have mercy on the good, and delay Thy promises no longer." Those were Savonarola's farewell words

from the pulpit to the citizens of Florence. When first announcing, in 1489, his intention of preaching in the church of San Marco, he had stated, according to Burlamacchi, that he would continue to preach in Florence for the space of eight years. That period had now been fulfilled; it was just some months over eight years since the prediction was made, and at San Marco he closed the ministry which then he was about to begin.

There was yet one resource left for the persecuted apostle of righteousness. Realising that the hostility of the Pope was unrelenting, and that the magistrates now chosen by the Florentines were set against himself and bent on playing into the Pope's hands, Savonarola determined to employ the weapon which hitherto he had held in reserve. Now was the time, he decided, to appeal to the princes of Europe, urging them to summon the General Council, on which he relied so much for the rectification of the abuses of the Church. This was the "turn of the key," the mighty cry "Lazarus, come forth," by which, some time before, he had vowed to astonish and startle Christendom. Now that all efforts towards conciliation had failed, and matters were being driven to extremities, he resolved to deal his last daring stroke. And the favourable moment for it seemed to have arrived. Alexander VI. was becoming increasingly unpopular. His avarice, his unblushing nepotism, the scandals of his life and court, had aroused bitter feelings both in Italy and abroad. Many of the cardinals even were ready to welcome a scheme which might be expected to rid the Church of the pernicious influence of such a man; and one of them, Cardinal Rovere

of San Pietro in Vincoli, who had been Alexander's most formidable competitor for the Papal chair, had long been plotting to get such a scheme carried into effect. Charles VIII. of France also was supposed to be waiting for some definite encouragement to move in that very direction. Savonarola had already prepared the letters which he designed to send to that monarch, and to the sovereigns of Spain, Germany, England, and Hungary. Those "Letters to the Princes" were all substantially the same in purport. "The Church is steeped in shame and crime from head to foot. You, instead of exerting yourselves to deliver her, bow down before the source of all this evil. Therefore the Lord is angry and hath left the Church for so long without a shepherd. I assure you in the word of the Lord that this Alexander is no Pope at all, and should not be accounted as such; for, besides having attained to the chair of St. Peter by the shameless sin of simony, and still daily selling benefices to the highest bidder,—besides his other vices which are known to all the world, I affirm also that he is not a Christian, and does not believe in the existence of God, which is the deepest depth of unbelief." That was the introduction; and then the princes were enjoined to unite in convoking a Council as soon as possible in some suitable and neutral place, while he, Savonarola, on his side, gave the assurance that God would confirm the truth of his words by miraculous signs.

As a preliminary step, Savonarola, through the aid of influential friends, opened communication with the Florentine envoys at the chief foreign courts, informing them of the reasons for the proposal, and

soliciting their good offices in its behalf. One of those friends was Domenico Mazzinghi, who wrote to Guasconi, the envoy in France; but of the two copies of the letter, which, for greater safety, Mazzinghi sent off, one was intercepted by the spies of Ludovico of Milan, and by him forwarded to the Pope. Alexander's rage was remorseless now, a rage embittered by terror, for the dread of his life for years past had been the possibility of a General Council being convened. Savonarola's own letters to the princes of Europe were never despatched. Before there was time to ascertain, from the correspondence with the envoys, whether the way was ready for launching the proposal and throwing the ecclesiastical world into commotion, the tempest broke over him in Florence itself, and fell upon him with a blow which crippled all further power and effort.

## CHAPTER XXII

### The Ordeal by Fire

It is only too patent that Savonarola's association with the party politics of Florence was the main cause contributing to his downfall and to the tragedy of his career. It provoked opposition to him on political grounds, which was malignantly brought to bear against his religious work and aims. It was political antagonism which drove him into collision with ecclesiastical authority and embroiled him in hostile relations with the Pope. Men assailed the prophetic claims of the preacher, because the stand he took was an obstacle to their partisan designs in matters affecting the State. This was at the bottom of the persistent persecution which beset him even after he had been reduced to silence and shut up in his convent by the order of the Signory and the Papal ban. His rivals, the Franciscans, now received every encouragement to turn their attacks upon him. They had always been forward to point out the errors of his teaching, but so long as Savonarola held sway in the pulpit and enthralled men by the blaze of his eloquence, their jealous cavilling and detraction met with little regard. When, however, the decree of excommunication came and was

set at nought, they found their opportunity. People were eager to hear the validity of the excommunication discussed. The Franciscans of Santa Croce, envious of the superior fame gained by the Dominicans of San Marco, were conspicuous by their vehemence in this controversy, and from the moment that Savonarola was silenced they redoubled their zeal in stigmatising his conduct as revolutionary and heretical. One of their number, Fra Francesco di Puglia, who was preaching in the church of Santa Croce during that Lent of 1498, was carried away so far by the heat of his polemical passion, that he declared his readiness to enter a burning fire "along with the adversary," as he said, in order to test the validity or nullity of the excommunication and the truth or error of Savonarola's prophetic pretensions. This challenge was at once taken up by Savonarola's enthusiastic disciple, Fra Domenico da Pescia, who was still preaching on his master's behalf, and eager as ever to display his loyalty and devotion. Domenico lost no time in publishing the "Conclusions," or propositions, which he was prepared to prove by accepting the fiery ordeal; namely, that the Church was in need of reform, and would be chastised first and then restored; that Florence also would be chastised, and afterwards restored to flourish anew; that the infidels would be converted to Christianity; that these things would come to pass in that very age; and that the excommunication pronounced against Fra Girolamo Savonarola was invalid, and might be disregarded without sin.

Savonarola realised the dangerous nature of the ground on which his trusty follower was venturing,

and endeavoured to restrain his imprudent ardour, although it was soon evident that he was quite powerless to control the issues that had been raised. The whole matter was complicated by the strange action of the Signory in giving official countenance to the carrying out of such a test. They summoned both parties to an audience, and called upon them to present the terms on which they desired the experiment to be made. Fra Domenico's "Conclusions" were duly registered. Fra Francesco, however, seeing that Domenico was really in earnest, endeavoured to draw back from any pledge to undergo the ordeal with him; it was with Fra Girolamo himself, he avowed, that he was ready to pass through the fire; and as Fra Girolamo held aloof he retired from the contest, putting forward another monk, Fra Giuliano Rondinelli, as one who was willing in his stead to maintain the challenge with Fra Domenico. Domenico, on the other hand, pleaded that Savonarola was reserved for higher things, and had still more important work to accomplish, and his time had not yet come.

The subject awakened a feverish interest not only among the magistrates and the religious orders concerned, but throughout the city. It was the sensation of the hour; the Florentines could talk of nothing else; and all looked forward impatiently to a spectacle more dramatically exciting than any which even that generation, that had seen so many stirring events, had yet witnessed. The Arrabbiati plied their wily arts in hastening on the ordeal, in the expectation that somehow their great adversary would be crushed or disgraced. That wild band of mischief-makers, the

Compagnacci, brought their influence to bear on the temporising, unscrupulous Signory, trusting that at length had come their best chance of ruining the man they feared, and hated because they feared. The Piagnoni, on their part, were zealous for the honour and credit of their revered leader, and hoped that he would consent to have his mission and message vindicated by the test proposed, and by the supernatural triumph which they fully believed would be given. Many of them were ready to accept the challenge for him. There was quite a throng of volunteers—respectable citizens, women, and children even—fervently desirous of passing through the fire to prove the truth of his teaching and claims; while the members of his own brotherhood of San Marco—and they numbered almost three hundred at this date—vied with each other in their enthusiastic anxiety to show their loyalty by offering themselves for the ordeal. Fra Mariano Ughi came early to the front, and friars of such distinguished family as Fra Malatesta Sacromoro and Fra Roberto Salviati signed a declaration to stake their lives.

To the Signory, this multitude of competitors on the one side for the privilege of undergoing the test was rather perplexing. A meeting of officials was held on 30th March, and in the discussions many declared the question to be one which the ecclesiastical authorities should be left to settle; but the predominant feeling was that the ordeal should be proceeded with as a means of quieting the public mind, and healing the divisions in the city. Even the sympathisers with Savonarola who were present joined in advising that the matter should go forward, their hope being that

the issue would redound to his greater glory. It was finally agreed that the ordeal should take place; further, that if the Dominican champion should perish, Savonarola must leave the city; or if the Franciscan champion, then Fra Francesco must go. Should both champions, however, succumb to the flames, the sentence of banishment was to fall on the Dominicans alone; and if one or other of them refused to enter the fire, he and his party should suffer the penalty.

Savonarola took no active steps to prevent the ordeal. When he addressed a large company of his followers on the 1st of April at San Marco, he found every one eager to face the trial. *Ecco mi! Ecco mi!* "Behold me! Behold me, ready to go into the fire for the glory of the Lord!" was the cry which rose round him on every side. The enthusiasm thus exhibited struck him as a sign from God that a miracel was going to be wrought. In this assurance he was encouraged by a vision of Fra Silvestro Maruffi, one of the San Marco brethren, a man of highly nervous and emotional temperament, whose strange hallucinations and hysterical fancies of communications from the unseen had often exercised an undue influence on Savonarola's mind, and confirmed that tendency, so perilously ensnaring to him, to indulge in pious delusions. This weak and excitable brother now announced that he had seen the guardian angels of Fra Girolamo and Fra Domenico, who had declared to him that Fra Domenico would pass through the fire unhurt.

It was hoped by many, alike on his own side and on the side of his opponents, that circumstances would force Savonarola to come forward and submit to the test himself; and there was much surprise, and even

disappointment, created by his studious evasion of the challenge which Fra Francesco had laid down. It was only to be expected, men thought, that he who had claimed so peculiarly favoured a relation with Heaven should be prepared in person to subject his claims to some form of arbitrament in which the will of Heaven could be emphatically revealed. In all this he was only reaping the fruits of his own extravagant conceptions of his mission, and of the misguided insistence on his exceptional standing and character as the inspired messenger of God. His adherents were led to entertain the confidence that no fire could touch the Prophet of the Most High, and they were eager to see his credit established by the triumphant Divine manifestation which they were sure would be vouchsafed. His enemies deemed that they had good grounds for demanding his acceptance of an ordeal which would put his pretensions to the proof, and rejoiced in the prospect of having him exposed to a danger from which they did not believe he could possibly escape. To such views and expectations, which he knew to be widely prevalent, he replied in a printed statement on the subject, arguing that he was keeping himself in reserve for a greater work than such contests about the validity or nullity of the excommunication—the reformation of morals and of the Church; and that if his adversaries meant to prove the validity of his excommunication, they should first answer the arguments he had advanced, and then it would be time to settle the question by fire. As to the proposed experiment, he said that, should it indeed take place, which he was disposed to doubt, he had little hesitation in believing that they who went into it truly

inspired by the Lord would emerge without harm from the flames. His attitude in the matter, it must be allowed, was sufficiently reasonable and honest, but it was one which, in the confused and excited state of the public mind at the moment, was seriously compromising to his reputation for consistency.

The Pope was duly informed of the whole affair. Bonsi had told him of what was transpiring; and, besides, the brothers of San Marco wrote a letter to his Holiness, explaining the circumstances, and pleading the justice of the cause which the trial by fire was intended to decide. Alexander, it appears, did not relish the idea of having his sentence of excommunication subjected to any such test; in his view its validity rested on his own authority as the occupant of the pontifical chair. The Signory at Florence, learning of his disinclination to sanction the ordeal, and wakening up at last to the gravity and awkwardness of the situation, sought refuge in delay, hoping that some message might come from Rome which would put an ecclesiastical prohibition on the course proposed. The 6th of April had been originally fixed for the great event; it was now postponed to the following day. It was, moreover, formally decided that Fra Domenico da Pescia and Fra Giuliano Rondinelli should be accepted as the champions, and that in the event of Fra Domenico being burned Savonarola should leave Florence within three hours. Fra Domenico's ardour increased as the day approached; he fully believed in a supernatural deliverance. Rondinelli had no such assurance; he expressed his conviction that both would perish in the flames; but he was quite willing himself to suffer "for the good of souls."

For several days the friars on both sides devoted themselves to prayer and fasting. When at last the 7th of April dawned, the commotion of feeling in the city was wrought up to an extraordinary degree. The prohibitory message which the Signory anxiously looked for from the Pope had not arrived; and accordingly the requisite preparations were made for the fateful experiment which monopolised every one's thoughts. In the Piazza della Signoria, the scene of many a stirring and sensational episode in history, a platform was erected, sixty yards long and ten yards broad, stretching out from the front of the Palazzo Vecchio, and on it were piled two rows of faggots saturated with oil and pitch, with a narrow space between, along which the champions were intended to pass. At the request of Savonarola, it was arranged that the fuel should first be lighted at the farther end of the platform, and that when the two friars entered at the other the torch should then be applied to hem them in behind. To provide against a tumult, the openings into the piazza were guarded by soldiers; troops were stationed in front of the palace balcony; but each party had taken the precaution to arm a section of their own adherents and place them where they might be of use in case of need. Thus three hundred Piagnoni, with Marcuccio Salviati at their head, were drawn up to protect Savonarola and his monks from San Marco; while on the other side of the piazza, as a defence to the Franciscans, stood a band of five hundred Compagnacci, under their dashing, violent leader Dolfo Spini, whose presence brought a dangerous element into the scene.

During the time these preparations were going on,

Savonarola was celebrating Mass at San Marco. At the close of the ceremony he went into the pulpit and addressed the gathering of monks and devoted friends in a tone which, though exceedingly solemn, yet betrayed a hesitation and diffidence in him quite unusual. "I cannot be certain," he said, "that the ordeal will take place, for that does not depend upon us; but I am able to tell you that if it does take place, the victory will certainly be ours." He appealed to God to bear witness that he and his side had been challenged, and that they could not refuse to defend His honour; and when he turned to the congregation and asked, "Are you willing to serve God, O my people?" every voice answered, "Yes," with prompt and enthusiastic fervour. Then he told the women present to remain in the church and continue in prayer till the trial was over.

Meanwhile an enormous multitude had assembled in the Piazza della Signoria. The great open space was filled with a mass of people, that grew ever more dense and closely packed as the hour of the great event drew near. The windows, balconies, and roofs of the houses all round were thronged; every pillar, cornice, or piece of statuary was taken advantage of by eager sightseers. It seemed as if the whole population of Florence had crowded there together, strung to the highest pitch of expectation. For rarely in human experience is it given to witness an actual manifestation of the supernatural, and such a manifestation was now looked for by the great majority in that immense assemblage, a spectacle of miraculous interposition which would feed the love of the marvellous so deeply seated in the human heart, and which would supply a sensation

that would dazzle the eyes, set the nerves thrilling, and hold its place in the memory till the end of life.

The Loggia dei Lanzi, that interesting structure, with its graceful columns and arches, and its striking statues, which stands on the left side of the Piazza, not far from the entrance to the Palazzo Vecchio, was set apart for the accommodation of the two rival bodies of friars—the half nearest the Palazzo being allotted to the Franciscans, the other half farther off to the Dominicans from San Marco. The Franciscans were already in their places, having come early, without any demonstration, and now stood waiting in their frocks of grey. It had just struck twelve, when the sound of singing was heard, and Savonarola and his followers appeared. They marched into the square, as they had done through the streets, in solemn procession, the monks first, between two and three hundred in number; then Fra Domenico, arrayed in a red cope, a cross in his hand, and bearing himself with serene and exalted mien; then Savonarola himself, on whom at once all eyes were fixed, clad in the white robe of the priest, and carrying before him the Blessed Sacrament; while a band of faithful disciples, holding aloft lighted torches, filed in behind, all chaunting the psalm, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered," and repeating the first verse as a refrain, which was taken up by a multitude of voices in the crowd with a fervour and force so startling that the very ground under foot, as Burlamacchi relates, appeared to tremble. The friars mounted the steps and moved into their compartment in the Loggia, Savonarola placed the Sacrament on the altar set there beforehand for the purpose, and he and Fra Domenico knelt for a few minutes in

front of it till the chaunting ceased. Then all was ready; the vast multitude was hushed, and watched with palpitating emotions for the issue of that strange contest which had brought them together.

Savonarola had risen from his knees and faced the crowd, calm and confident. He had been troubled with doubts as to the moral legitimacy of the trial, which nevertheless, through pressure of circumstances, he had been forced to sanction. But now he looked as if all misgivings had vanished. He felt convinced that his cause was the cause of a righteous God, and that, as this mode of vindicating himself and his position had not been of his own choosing, surely God would be with him and show His favour by preserving the champion who was risking life on his side. As for Fra Domenico, he stood there with radiant countenance and dauntless heart, anxious to confront the test which would redound, as he believed, to the glory of God and his beloved leader.

There was some delay, however, which was unintelligible to the mass of spectators. The members of the Signory had not taken their position on the Palace balcony. The Franciscan champion, Fra Rondinelli, was not to be seen, neither was his instigator, Fra Francesco di Puglia, in whose behalf he had pledged himself to undergo the ordeal. The fact was that both were engaged inside the palace in anxious consultation with the Signory over certain difficulties, which their vacillation at the last moment had moved them to raise. They objected, first of all, to Domenico's entering the flames with the red cope which he wore; then, when this had been removed, they found fault with his ordinary vestments as being possibly enchanted

against the fire. Savonarola protested against an objection so frivolous, but at last yielded, and Domenico was taken into the palace to change clothes with Alessandro Strozzi, one of the San Marco brethren, who, when he heard his name called, in his sanguine fervour imagined that he was to have the honour of meeting the challenge, and threw himself at Savonarola's feet to receive his blessing, with the *Te Deum Laudamus* bursting from his lips. The delay thus caused was exceedingly tantalising to the waiting multitude, who soon became restless and indignant. There were cries for Savonarola himself to step forward and begin the trial. Then came an outbreak of wild disorder, during which the armed Compagnacci made a dash across the square, intent on doing violence to the object of their hate, but were beaten back by Salviati, who, at the head of his band of Piagnoni, drew a line on the ground in front of the Loggia, and dared them to cross it. Suddenly a thunderstorm broke overhead, and rain fell in drenching torrents. But the crowd waited on, subdued into comparative quietness once more, and impatient for the spectacle which they hoped might yet be forthcoming.

The storm ceased as suddenly as it had begun, but fresh difficulties arose. Rondinelli remained still in the Palazzo; he and his supporters insisted that Domenico should put aside the crucifix which he carried in his hands. This Domenico agreed to do, but expressed his determination to enter the fire bearing the Sacrament instead. The Franciscans exclaimed against this proposal with indignant horror. It would be impious presumption, they argued, thus to expose the Sacred Host. On the other hand, Domenico and

Savonarola pleaded, if the Host were burned, it would be the accidents only which would be consumed, the substance would remain. The discussion on the point appeared endless. There was a constant moving to and fro, a coming and going between the palace and the Loggia, but with no definite result; neither party would give way. Again the crowd became restless. Hours had passed; the day, which was expected to be so sensationally eventful, had worn by, wasted in seemingly fruitless disputes; the shadows of night were gathering, and nothing had happened, nothing been done; and murmurs of discontent were everywhere heard.

At length, as darkness set in, the Signory, who had been painfully perplexed all day, realising the deadlock to which the matter had come, decided to suspend the ordeal, and gave orders to both parties to retire to their convents. Furious was the rage of the swarming mass of people when that order became known. Weary, hungry, drenched, and cramped by the tight pressure they had so long been obliged to bear, they were in no mood to accept the disappointment which now fell upon them. They had waited and waited through the slow-moving hours for the sight of that supernatural marvel which they had been persuaded to look for, and no marvel had been wrought. Exclamations of bitterness and of baffled expectation arose on every hand, and it was against Savonarola chiefly that the irritation was turned. Why, men asked in querulous scorn, had he personally hung back, and deprived them of the miracle which he had so often proclaimed as certain to be given in attestation of his mission from God? Even large numbers who had warmly admired him, and

counted themselves amongst his followers, showed their angry vexation. They, like others, were craving for a supernatural token which should prove the truth of the great Friar's teaching, and which, moreover, would gratify their pride in him as their leader; and they deemed themselves sorely aggrieved by what seemed to them his reprehensible weakness in not stepping forward in person and volunteering to settle the whole question by daring the fiery test alone, and giving the sign desired. The revulsion of feeling was so great, and the tumult of resentment so strong, that Savonarola found it essential to request a guard from the Signory to protect him and his monks on their way home through the streets. The request was complied with, but the march to San Marco was a sad contrast to the solemn dignity and exalted enthusiasm of the morning procession. Slowly and with difficulty Savonarola and his company of friars moved on, assailed by the reproaches, gibes, and imprecations of the mob, and only saved from positive violence by the armed escort accompanying them, and by the reverence felt for the Sacrament which he was carrying back in his hands.

It was a melancholy downfall, a veritable tragedy of reverse. Here was the man who, in a momentous crisis, had been the dictator of Florentine affairs, the idol of the people for several years, their lawgiver, their spiritual director, the eloquent prophet-preacher on whose lips they had hung, and who had swayed them in glowing fervour or in tremulous penitential awe—now disowned, and turned upon with ruthless bitterness, and that by the very people amongst whom his best work had been performed and his greatest

triumphs won. It was not because of any unworthiness in himself, nor because of anything sinister in his aims, nor any deterioration in his character. His strong and lofty soul had lost none of its strenuous nobility of purpose. But he had been carried away with increasing readiness by pious self-delusions, by errors of the fancy born of morbid religious excitement, and by the beguiling consciousness of exceptional insight into the ways of God. And hence, mistakenly, but honestly enough, he had advanced claims to Divine inspiration which fired men's minds and led them to look for some signal demonstration of his heavenly power. And when the expectations thus kindled were all of a sudden baulked and quenched, it was but natural that there should be a wild rebound, a spasm of indignant resentment, in which all the admiration and faith he had evoked towards himself were shaken. The temper of the crowd, and the execrations hurled at Savonarola that evening, as the convent gates closed behind him, made it abundantly evident that the spell was broken. The prophetic halo which had surrounded him in the eyes of the people was gone. The wand of the magician had crumbled in his hands.

The supplications of the women in the convent church had been maintained through the whole of that anxious day. Savonarola went in, made his way to the pulpit, and spoke to them a few words in explanation of what had occurred, counselled them and the brethren who had come in with him to live a godly life, and then, after the *Te Deum* had been sung, dismissed them with his blessing.

Painful must have been his reflections as he shut himself up in his cell, at the end of the long corridor,

that night. He could not but know that the malignant purpose of his enemies had been gained, that his power had been shattered, that his credit with the citizens was ruined. What self-questionings racked his mind, or what chills of discouragement came over him, no one can tell. But this certainly we know, from what his subsequent demeanour revealed, that his loyalty to God and his own soul held fast, his spirit kept true to its highest aims, and his courage survived unquelled to confront the dark catastrophe which was casting its shadow over his path.

# CHAPTER XXIII

## The Bursting of the Storm

The sensational project of the Ordeal by Fire had ended in a fiasco. While this result was regarded by the Arrabbiati as the very triumph for their designs on which they had built their hopes, it was apparently accepted by Savonarola as a death-blow to his personal reputation, and to that singular moral ascendancy which he had so long been permitted to wield. It is evident that he frankly recognised the fatal termination to his career, now ominously drawing nigh. The day following the foiled experiment was Palm Sunday, and in the morning a congregation of worshippers assembled in San Marco Church. He appeared among them, and in a brief address declared his readiness to give his life for his flock, and bade them a loving and sorrowful farewell.

For some hours the excitement still working in the breasts of the Florentine populace was in large measure outwardly suppressed; but later in the day, when numerous parties of the Friar's yet unshaken adherents sought to enter the Duomo, where Fra Mariano Ughi, one of those who had offered to pass through the fire, was expected to preach, they found themselves hustled, insulted, and worried with scornful jeers. The Com-

pagnacci were there in strong force, both inside the building and at the doors, and it was obvious at once that violence was to be used to prevent the service being held. Amid the confusion and rough treatment some one was provoked to retaliate; swords were drawn, and there was a rush for the street. There, meanwhile, bands of wild lads had been stationed, waiting to pelt the faithful Piagnoni with stones. "To San Marco, to San Marco!" cried the reckless Compagnacci, and the hurriedly gathering mob responded to the cry. On their way through the streets they attacked an inoffensive man who was singing a psalm as he went to vespers, and with irreverent gibes ran him through with a spear. Another, a devout spectacle-maker, who stepped from his door, slippers in hand, to remonstrate with the rioters, was struck dead by one cruel blow.

The vesper service was just closing when the church of San Marco was reached, and the kneeling congregation, startled by the volley of stones which came crashing through the windows, hastily dispersed. The church doors and the gates of the convent were at once shut and securely barred, a small party of about thirty loyally attached citizens remaining to lend their aid in the defence. Without Savonarola's knowledge, but with the connivance of certain of the brothers, a few of those friends had, during the previous days, made preparations for withstanding a siege, and had secretly brought into the convent a supply of weapons of various kinds, ammunition, and even, it is said, cannons. The arms were now produced, and a small number of the monks—about fifteen or twenty only, as far as can be ascertained—joined the laymen in equipping them-

selves for the fray. Many more were disposed to take part in the struggle, but were restrained by the admonitions of Savonarola, who exhorted them not to stain their hands with blood. His remonstrances, however, seconded though they were by the earnest entreaties of Fra Domenico, had no effect on the few ardent spirits —foremost among them Fra Benedetto, the skilful miniature painter, and Fra Luca della Robbia—who had already donned their accoutrements and seized the weapons which they were impatient to employ. Seeing that his words were in vain, and hearing the noise of the furious attack outside, he hurriedly put on his priest's cope, took a crucifix in his hand as his only protection, and bent his steps towards the gate, to surrender himself at once to the raging crowd, saying as he did so, "It is on my account that this storm has arisen." The throng of brothers and citizens pressed round him, and with urgent expostulations succeeded in holding him back from his purpose.

There was a brief lull in the uproar in the Piazza; but when a messenger arrived from the Signory—who had been sitting in consultation through the afternoon —conveying an order that the defenders should lay down their arms, and that Savonarola should go into banishment within twelve hours, the onset on the convent was renewed. It was then that Savonarola's old and trusted friend, Francesco Valori, who had been actively engaged in the defence, left the convent by climbing over the garden wall, his object being, as is supposed, to look after the safety of his own household, and also to rally the more staunch Piagnoni to their master's aid. Valori reached his home only to find it soon surrounded by a crowd of rioters, who threatened

to sack it and burn it to the ground. His wife, drawn in alarm to the window on hearing the tumult, was shot dead by a bolt from a crossbow. A few minutes afterwards, an official came from the Signory to summon Valori himself at once to the Palace; and as he obeyed, firm and fearless as ever, and confident in his own integrity, he was set upon and slain, ere he had gone far on the way, by some kinsmen of Rudolfi and Tornabuoni, in revenge for the part he had taken in procuring the condemnation and execution of those and the other Medicean conspirators in the previous year.

The mob around San Marco increased as the darkness of that Palm Sunday evening fell, and the assault on the convent waxed fiercer. Fire was applied to the doors, and the most determined efforts were made to force an entrance into the building. Savonarola, calling the monks together, led them singing in procession through the cloisters, and then into the choir of the church, telling them that prayer was the only lawful weapon for them to use. The majority of the laymen present were subdued into reverence, and came in behind to join in the act of worship. There, in the dimly-lighted sanctuary, he and they continued to kneel, chaunting the Litany, "Save Thy people, O Lord," and preparing their minds for death, if so it should be, by the sacred exercises of devotion. Amid the noise of the rabble without, the battering at the gates, and every sign of menacing danger, Savonarola put aside all attempt at warlike defence, and kept his company of brothers and followers long prostrate in supplication before the Almighty; and thus together they awaited the development of events.

At last, by scaling the walls, many of the assailants

gained access to the cloisters, and the younger monks and other helpers who had armed for the conflict hurried off to make what resistance they could. There was a scene of clamour and confusion in which the grotesque and the pathetic were strangely mingled. The zealous brothers, with breastplates over their Dominican robes and helmets on their heads, brandished a halberd, a sword, or an arquebus. Some fought with lighted torches, or with metal crosses, shouting aloud, *Viva Cristo!* Some, led by Fra Benedetto, mounted aloft and poured down a shower of stones and tiles upon their opponents. And even amid blows and bruises and bleeding wounds, the loyalty displayed was touching. A young man, mortally stricken, was borne into the choir, and, after receiving the Sacrament, expired with the words, which he had often heard his beloved master repeat, on his lips, "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," and declaring with a smile on his face, "I have never been so happy as now." Some one rang the convent bell, tolling out an appeal to the city for assistance, but the only answer that came was a fresh decree from the Signory, pronouncing all to be rebels who did not leave the convent within an hour; and accordingly several friends, realising the hopelessness of the struggle, deemed it advisable to retire to their homes.

At length the doors of the church were burned through, and as the smoke became suffocating and the mob with volleys of shot were pushing in, Savonarola, who maintained an unresisting attitude throughout, marched his friars and all who were not engaged in the fight, back along the cloisters into the convent library,

where, in kneeling posture before the Sacrament, the chaunting of the Litanies was resumed, while in other parts of the convent the din of strife went on. The prayerful vigil was interrupted by another affecting instance of devotion. One of Savonarola's disciples, an obscure tradesman of the city, was brought in wounded, pleading to see the master, at whose feet he bent with the fervent request that he might be received into the brotherhood. It was Savonarola's last act of authority to grant his wish, and to invest him with the friar's cloak.

About midnight a peremptory order came from the Signory, commanding Savonarola, Fra Domenico, and Fra Silvestro to deliver themselves up at the Palace without delay. They were assured of a safe return as soon as the tumult was quelled; but should they resist, the warning was given that the convent would be stormed by artillery. Savonarola was prepared to surrender, but as the order had not been conveyed in writing, and the leading brethren were suspicious of treachery, the officers were sent back for the formal document on which alone reliance could be placed. In the interval of waiting, Savonarola drew the sorrowing company closer round him, and, addressing them as his "children," with deep feeling and strong faith spoke to them a few parting words. Before God and in presence of the Blessed Sacrament he reasserted the truth of his doctrines. What he had taught, he avowed, he had received from God, who was his witness in heaven that he did not lie. He did not know, he said, that the whole city would so soon turn against him, yet he was content that the will of the Lord should be done. "My last counsel to you is this: let

faith, patience, and prayer be your weapons. I leave you with anguish and grief to give myself into my enemies' hands. I do not know whether they will take my life, but I am certain that if I must die, I shall be able to aid you in heaven more than I have been able to do on earth. Take comfort, embrace the cross, and by it you will find the harbour of salvation." Then, to fortify his spirit for whatever fate was in store, he confessed to Fra Domenico and received the Sacrament.

But there was a Judas in the camp. Fra Malatesta Sacromoro, the very man who had zealously signified his willingness to accept the ordeal of fire on his master's behalf a few days before, had been so shaken in his steadfastness by the disappointing turn events had taken, that at this most trying moment he condescended to play the traitor's part. By his advice, now secretly tendered, the Compagnacci storming the convent were urged to hurry on the Signory in sending the written decree of arrest. And soon the decree arrived, with the commander of the Palace guard and his men to enforce its demands. Savonarola was entreated by his friends to escape over the walls and flee, but the remark interposed by Malatesta, "Should not the shepherd lay down his life for the sheep?" so deeply touched him that he at once banished the thought from his mind. Turning to the brethren, he embraced them with tender affectionateness—Malatesta among the first—and took his sad farewell. "My dear brothers," he said, "remember you have no need to doubt. The work of the Lord will go forward without ceasing, and my death will only hasten it on." Amid the tears and sobs of the men who had known by intimate fellowship his

worth and truth and faithful kindness, he left his beloved San Marco for ever, and, along with the always devoted Fra Domenico, gave himself up to the officials appointed to make the arrest.

When he appeared outside, with his hands tied behind him, the mad glee of the crowd knew no bounds. The glare of the torches carried by the guards lit up a sea of wild, jeering faces, every face turned in triumphant derision on the victim of political animosity, ecclesiastical corruption, and, alas, of popular fickleness and ingratitude. Stones were hurled at him, insults heaped upon him, cries of execration and foul reproach howled in his ears, as he was led through those streets which he had so often trodden before on errands of usefulness, or in devout procession with his array of monks, chaunting psalms of praise. Those who could get near enough in the press assailed him with the most vulgar indignities. Some, flashing their lanterns in his face, called out, "There goes the true light." Others struck him, and with blasphemous scoff cried, "Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?" One kicked him from behind, with the coarse jest, "There is the seat of his prophetic power." His escort were obliged to cross their halberds over his head to shield him from savage blows.

Thus, in the dead of night, while many who still loved and honoured him were uncertain as to their line of conduct, and remained quietly in their homes, and while others—indeed, the larger proportion of the Florentine citizens—who had once been his admirers, were cooled in their sympathies and allowed matters to take their course, the devoted, unselfish benefactor of Florence, whose zeal for its welfare had led him

only too frankly to reprove its sins, was loaded with outrage by his worst enemies and by the reckless rabble who played into their hands; and amid frantic uproar and violence was marched, a prisoner, to the Palace of the Signory. There, after a few questions by the Gonfaloniere as to whether he persisted in the assertion of a Divine revelation in his teaching, to which he returned a clear affirmative reply, he was shut up alone in a cell in the bell-tower—the faithful Fra Domenico being confined in another part of the building. Fra Silvestro, who had been included in the order to surrender, had been in hiding and could not be found when the arrest at San Marco was made. Next morning, however, he emerged from his place of concealment, and by means of Fra Malatesta, as some witnesses averred, he was forced to give himself up at the Palace, though his weak, nervous soul rendered him but poorly fitted to endure the tribulation which his stronger companions were facing so nobly. In the course of the day, nineteen others, both friars and citizens, who had made themselves conspicuous in defending the convent, were also laid under arrest.

Intelligence flew to Rome, and the Pope was highly gratified. Through the letters intercepted by the agents of Duke Ludovico of Milan, he had become fully informed of Savonarola's efforts to incite the Powers of Europe to summon a General Council, the first business of which, as he knew, would be to examine his own title to hold the pontifical throne; and he was delighted at the downfall of the prime mover in such a project. He sent a Brief to the Signory, expressing his great pleasure that the scandal caused by the excommunicated Friar was now brought to an end,

praising them for what they had done, granting absolution from all their recent offences towards the Holy Church and its head, and promising plenary indulgence and restoration to the Church to all followers of the Friar who should repent of their errors. The Brief, besides, stipulated that Savonarola and his two associates, after being examined, should be sent to Rome for the final settlement of their case, under the charge of special delegates whom his Holiness would himself appoint. Alexander wrote also to the Franciscans of Santa Croce, commending them for their "holy zeal and evangelical charity," which he would hold in lasting remembrance; and to Francesco di Puglia, exhorting him to persevere in the good and pious work till the evil should be entirely destroyed. The Duke of Milan, too, was profuse in his congratulations; a powerful obstacle to his designs on the independence of Florence was removed.

So Savonarola's foes rejoiced over him. With his voice smothered, his power shattered, his followers cowed, or paralysed by perplexity; a captive in the grasp of men who sought his ruin,—all things conspired to deepen his humiliation; and even that exalted potentate, the King of France, to whom he had looked with such sanguine, fanciful hope as the divinely-intended saviour of Italy, was no longer able to aid him. Charles VIII. had died suddenly of apoplexy, in a wretched hovel at Amboise, on the very day when Savonarola and his champion were confronting the Florentine crowd in view of the expected ordeal by fire. Henceforth, all confidence in man was vain.

Ere the Pope's congratulatory Brief arrived, the examination and trial of Savonarola had already begun,

and the record of its proceedings forms a miserable and melancholy story. At the very outset, the Signory, on the plea of State necessity, took the unconstitutional step of decreeing that a fresh election of the Councils of the Ten and of the Eight should be immediately held, although the complete term of those at the time in office had not expired. The sole reason for such a course was that the members of those Councils, of the Ten especially, were known to be favourable to the Friar, and it was desired to fill the posts with men more decidedly in sympathy with the party that had now risen into power. Their end was gained, and on the 11th of April a commission of seventeen was appointed to conduct the examination, with full power to use such means as they might find expedient to extort the evidence required. It was clear at once that no attempt was made to secure an impartial tribunal, for among the commissioners chosen were some of Savonarola's bitterest opponents, such as Piero degli Alberti, and the vindictive, hot-headed Dolfo Spini himself. Indeed, the whole arrangements for the trial were so manifestly unjust, that one of the members elected for the commission, Bartolo Zati, indignantly declined to act, declaring that he "would have no share in this murder."

Holy Week though it was, when men professing the Christian faith should be moved to patience, mercy, and charity, the judges of Savonarola displayed a ruthless eagerness in dealing out harshness and cruelty. The charges brought against him had reference to his religious teaching, his political conduct, and his prophecies; and to elicit incriminating replies from him on these points, he was taken to the upper hall of the

Bargello, and there questioned and put to the torture. It was a barbarous procedure, a survival of the severe mediæval methods of justice, which the boasted culture of Florence at that date should have rendered impossible. Savonarola was subjected to the horrible agony of the pulley; drawn up by a rope attached to the roof of the building, then let suddenly drop with a violent jerk, which strained and tore every muscle of his finely-strung, sensitive frame, enfeebled as it was by many anxious toils and rigid austerities. This was repeated again and again, and for days in succession, with the result that after a few "turns" of the rope he was thrown into delirium. "O Lord, take away my life," he was forced to cry in one of his worst spasms of anguish. And yet, when the grim infliction of the day was over, and he was sent back pained and wrenched to his cell, he could prostrate himself before God, and, like the Great Example, pray for his persecutors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

After the trial had gone on for several days, the Papal Brief, already spoken of, arrived. Highly pleased as the authorities were by its general terms, they felt gravely concerned with regard to the demand that Savonarola and his two companions should be sent to Rome. To yield to such a demand, it was thought, would be an affront to the dignity of Florence. In the Council held to debate the point, it was decided to make an evasive reply; to offer the fairest excuses possible for keeping the imprisoned friars in their own hands, to proceed with the trial, and meanwhile to take advantage of the Pope's favourable mood to press the Signory's oft-renewed request for permission to levy a

tax on ecclesiastical property in the city. Accordingly, the trial went forward, though the statements wrung from Savonarola were admitted to be utterly insufficient as proof of his guilt. A notary of the city, however, offered his services in reporting the evidence, pledging himself to put it in such a form as would show a clear ground for conviction. This was Ser Ceccone, who had once been sheltered by Savonarola, and saved from the peril of exile or death which his political misdeeds had incurred, and who now, after professing for some years to be a follower, turned against his benefactor. To the disgrace of the Florentine magistrates then in office, and of the commissioners who undertook the responsibility of the examination, Ser Ceccone, with the promise of four hundred ducats as his reward, was engaged to manipulate the depositions given in the trial, and make them suit the purpose intended. That is an established historical fact. Day after day Savonarola was made to writhe under the rope and pulley torture, aggravated at times by the application of burning coals to the soles of his feet as he hung suspended; and day after day the skilful notary twisted the often incoherent words which the maddening pain drew from him till their meaning was scandalously falsified. By alterations, omissions, and interpolations, the most innocent utterances were converted into confessions of damaging significance. Yet, notwithstanding the frequent incoherence of his replies, Savonarola remained marvellously firm in his asseveration of the truth of his teaching and the sincerity of his motives in seeking nothing but the good of Florence in his political action. There he was resolute and inflexible. It was only on

the question of his prophecies and visions that he exhibited any want of consistency in his statements. This had been the point in his public ministry which he found it most embarrassing to defend against criticism and attack, and he had always been inclined to indulge in vague and mystical explanations regarding it. Now, under the pressure of quivering bodily anguish, he expressed himself in terms which were vaguer still, and sometimes even contradictory. Indeed, the whole matter of his prophetic enlightenment rested on a basis so elusive that it is not difficult to understand how, in the confusion of brain which the torture caused, he should at one moment declare that his predictions were revelations direct from God, and at another that they were founded on his own opinions or on deductions derived from Scripture teaching. These contradictions Ser Ceccone did his best to set in a glaring light in his distorted version of the proceedings.

When the trial had continued for more than a week, the examiners determined to print the report drawn up by their notary. The document was read over to Savonarola, and by some means or other his signature to it was extorted in the presence of six monks from his own convent. Before affixing his name, he was asked by Ceccone, "Is all that *is* written here true?" and he made answer, "What *I have* written is true." And then, when the witnesses had duly signed, he begged them to take care of the novices and instruct them in good doctrine, and also to pray for himself, because, he said, the spirit of prophecy had gone from him at the moment.

The report, after being partially read before the

Signory, was duly published; but so slender were the grounds for conviction which it presented, that the authorities issued orders that all copies in circulation should be immediately returned to the printer, and another version was substituted for it, which proved in no wise more satisfactory. With chagrin and alarm, the magistrates realised their palpable failure to make out a case which would justify them in the extreme measures on which they were bent. They wrote to the Pope a humble excuse for their failure, pleading that they had to do with a man of the most extraordinary patience of body and wisdom of soul, who hardened himself against torture, involving the truth in all kinds of obscurity, with the intention of establishing for himself by pretended holiness an eternal name among men, or of braving imprisonment and death.

To Savonarola's adherents the publication of the report brought a painful shock. They were profoundly agitated in mind when they learned of what purported to be a confession by their revered leader of deception in his teaching. Many of the most loyal refused to believe in the genuineness of the document or in the possibility of such a confession having ever been made. Others, who had been thrown into perplexity by the fiasco of the ordeal by fire, too readily accepted the confession as a fact, and were yet more unsettled in their faith. There were others still who flung off all pretence of allegiance, boiling with indignation at the extent to which, as they thought, they had been befooled.

It was resolved to hold a second trial, which was begun on the 21st of April, and from that day to the

25th the same process of examination by torture and falsification of the depositions was repeated. A portion of the report was read before the Greater Council and an assembly of citizens, though not, as the law required, in the hearing of Savonarola; and to account for this the reader announced that the Friar had declined to be present through fear of being stoned—a statement which no one really believed.

This second trial was as obvious a failure as the first had been. It was the universal impression that the evidence needed to prove a capital offence had not yet been obtained. Nor could any charge of flagrant guilt be substantiated against Savonarola by the testimony of his two companions, whose examination had meantime been going on. Racked and tortured as Fra Domenico was, he remained steadfast in his avowal of confidence in his master's goodness, single-mindedness, and inspiration as a prophet of God; and although told that his master had retracted and owned himself a deceiver, he never for a moment wavered. With unflinching persistency the simple, brave monk bore witness to the innocence and sterling integrity of the man whose intimate associate and fellow-worker he had been for years. The hysterical Fra Silvestro was less resolute. His spirit quailed under the torture, and he was ready to utter whatever his tormentors suggested; yet even his evidence, with all its weak vacillations and all its cunning manipulation by Ser Ceccone, fell far short of fastening on Savonarola any imputation of guilty designs.

The result of the trials altogether was a disappointment to the Signory, who either desired, or felt bound by political exigencies to find, a justification for pro-

ceeding to extremes. So far they had been baffled in their purpose; even Ser Ceccone had failed to aid them as they hoped, and they dismissed their crafty tool with a fraction of the reward he had worked for —thirty ducats instead of the four hundred promised him.

Just as his second trial was beginning, an element of acute bitterness was thrown into Savonarola's cup of anguish, by the defection of his monks at San Marco. Those men displayed a lamentable pusillanimity, and actually took the step of formally disowning their master. Confounded by the reported retractation of his prophetic teaching, and dismayed by the painfully trying situation in which they now found themselves, — excommunicated, leaderless, exposed to the full weight of ecclesiastical penalties and popular scorn,—they broke down in their allegiance. They could no longer acknowledge a master who, as they were led to believe, had confessed himself a deceiver. Even the valorous, fine-spirited Fra Benedetto was for a time utterly unhinged in faith, and fled from the scene, although latterly, after a period of retirement in the country, he recovered his confidence in the great soul that had been his inspirer and guide. On the 21st of April the San Marco brethren wrote a letter of abject apology to the Pope, deploring the errors into which they had been drawn. They had been beguiled, they said, like many others, by the Fra Girolamo's commanding ability, by his exalted doctrines and holiness of life, and by the success of so many of his prophetic predictions. But now, having been disillusioned by his own avowal of deception, they made their humble

submission, and besought forgiveness. "Let it suffice your Holiness," they pleaded, "to punish the head and source of this offence; we, like sheep who have gone astray, return to the true shepherd."

Thus in his dire extremity Savonarola's own household turned against him.

# CHAPTER XXIV

## The Tragic Close

A brief respite from molestation followed the conclusion of the second trial. The Signory, though determined to compass the Friar's destruction, were obliged to pause for a time by the necessity of coming to terms with the Pope, who was again insisting on his demand that Savonarola and his companions should be sent to Rome for sentence and punishment. In their correspondence with Alexander VI. the Florentine magistrates urged that the execution should take place at Florence, where the offence had been committed, and that the Pope should send commissioners to examine the prisoners on his own behalf; and they gave it plainly to be understood that they had both the means and the will to bring about what they knew to be his Holiness' desire—the death of the man he feared. On this assurance they founded a renewal of their request for the liberty of taxing ecclesiastical property. The Pope finally agreed. A bargain was struck over the life of Savonarola. The Signory were to be allowed to carry out the sentence against him at Florence, on the tacitly implied condition that it was to be a sentence of doom; and, as an inducement to fulfil the engagement, the right to levy a tenth on ecclesiastical

property was granted for a period of three years. "Three times ten," was the grimly derisive remark of the Piagnoni, "make thirty; Savonarola, like the Saviour, is sold for thirty pieces of silver." Two commissioners were to be appointed by the Pope to act in his name and to see the case brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

Pending the settlement of these negotiations and the arrival of the Pope's representatives, Savonarola was left nearly a month in quiet in his prison-cell. He employed the interval in writing two short expositions, one on the 51st, and the other on the 31st Psalm, in which, in language saturated with the spirit of the Bible, he gave vent to the deepest emotions of his heart in communion with God. The treatise on Psalm 51 is exceedingly rich in scriptural quotations, and full of passionate yet reverent pleading for higher purity, more complete consecration, and firmer faith. It throbs, too, with yearning concern for the welfare of the Church, that its walls may be built up, and that then the Lord may accept the sacrifices of righteousness. "O Lord, how many sacrifices we offer at this day which are not acceptable to Thee, but rather abominable! For we offer the sacrifices not of righteousness, but of our own ceremonial; therefore are they not accepted by Thee. Where is now the glory of apostles? Where the courage of martyrs? Where the fruit of preachers? Where the holy simplicity of monks? Where the virtues and works of the early Christians? Then wilt Thou accept their sacrifices when Thou shalt adorn them with Thy grace and virtues. If, moreover, Thou wilt favourably regard Sion in Thy good pleasure, then shalt Thou accept the

sacrifice of righteousness, because the people will begin to live well, and to keep Thy commandments and to do righteousness, and Thy blessing shall be upon them. Then the offerings of the priests and the clergy will be acceptable to Thee, because forsaking earthly things they will gird themselves unto a purer life; and the unction of Thy blessing shall be upon their heads. Then will the whole burnt-offerings of the religious be acceptable to Thee when, forsaking sloth and lukewarmness, they shall be perfected in every part by the flame of Divine love. . . . Then shall Thy Church flourish; then shall she extend her borders; then shall Thy praise resound from the ends of the earth; then shall joy and gladness fill the world; then shall the saints be joyful in glory, then shall they rejoice in their beds, while they wait for Thee in the land of the living. Let that *then* be made *now* unto me, Lord, I beseech Thee, that Thou mayest have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy, that Thou mayest accept me for a sacrifice of righteousness, for an offering of holiness, for the whole burnt-offering of a religious life, for the young bullock of Thy Cross, whereby God grant that I may deserve to pass from this vale of misery to that glory which Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee."

In the exposition of Psalm 31 he speaks of his own depression and despair, and tells how hope has come to relieve him. "Heaviness hath besieged me, with a great and strong host hath hedged me in, she hath oppressed my heart with clamours and with weapons, day and night she ceaseth not to fight against me. My friends are in her camp, and are become mine enemies. Whatsoever I see, whatsoever I hear, they bring the

banners of Heaviness. The memory of friends saddens me; the remembrance of my children grieveth me; the thought of cloister and of cell tortures me; when I think upon my own studies, it affects me with sadness; the consideration of my sins weigheth me down. For even as to those sick of a fever all sweet things seem bitter, even so to me all things seem changed to mourning and heaviness. Verily a great weight upon the heart is this heaviness; the poison of asps, a deadly pestilence, murmurs against God, ceases not to blaspheme, exhorts to desperation. Unhappy that I am, who shall deliver me from her unhallowed hands? If all things which I see and hear follow her banners and fight stoutly against me, who shall be my protector? Who shall succour me? Whither shall I go? How shall I escape? I know what to do: I will turn me to things unseen, and will lead them forth against the things which are seen. And who shall be captain of an host so high and so terrible? Hope, which is of things invisible; Hope, I say, shall come against Heaviness and shall put her to rout. Who shall be able to stand against Hope? Hear what the prophet saith, Thou, Lord, art my Hope; Thou hast set my place of defence very high. Who shall stand against the Lord? Who shall be able to storm His place of refuge which is very high? I will call her, therefore, and she will make haste to come, and will not fail me. Lo, she hath come already; she hath brought gladness; she hath taught me to fight, and hath said unto me, Cry aloud, cease not; and I say, What shall I cry? Say, quoth she, boldly and with all thy heart, 'In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded for ever; in Thy righteousness deliver Thou

me.' O wondrous power of Hope, whose face Heaviness could not abide. Already comfort hath come. Now let Heaviness cry aloud and assail me with her host; let the world press me hard, let enemies rise against me; I fear nothing, because in Thee, Lord, have I hoped." And then he goes on to express his entire dependence on heavenly grace in words which Martin Luther afterwards claimed as a foreshadowing of his own doctrine of Justification by Faith. "I will hope in the Lord, even as my Hope hath taught me to hope, and I shall soon be delivered from all my troubles. By what merits shall I be delivered? Not mine own, Lord, but in Thy righteousness deliver me. In Thy righteousness, I say, not my own, for I seek for mercy; I put not forward my own righteousness. But if by grace Thou hast rendered me just, then have I Thy righteousness already. The Pharisees placed confidence in works of righteousness; they trusted indeed in their own righteousness; and therefore did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified before God. But the righteousness of God hath appeared by the grace of Jesus Christ, even without the works of the law."

Thus in his solitary confinement, high up in the Palazzo Vecchio tower, above the hum and clamour of the busy Piazza, the fervent-souled man, forsaken of friends and plotted against by foes, was wrapt in lofty contemplation; and there, in the long and lonely hours, with right arm bruised by the tortures he had undergone, he struggled, till paper was denied him, to pen a record of the thoughts by which he felt his heart strengthened and inspired. And the effort was

not in vain. For the two expositions, when soon afterwards published, were received with extraordinary interest. Their beauty of sentiment, devoutness of spirit, and glowing warmth of spiritual emotion, rendered them welcome to thousands of earnest men and women everywhere, who were yearning for some helpful stimulus and nourishment to their religious life. Indeed, the eager demand for those last words of Savonarola proved that the chord which he had struck during his wonderful ministry, though not responding so loudly as once it did to his touch, was still really vibrating in people's hearts. Within two years after his death, twenty-one editions of the short treatises were issued, and before the middle of the sixteenth century translations were made into English, French, German, Spanish, and the vernacular Italian. Even the few lines embodying a Rule for Virtuous Living, which he wrote on a book-cover at the request of his jailer, whose affection he had won, had to be printed to meet a widespread desire.

The lull in the storm was broken on the 19th of May, when the commissioners of the Pope made their entry into Florence with great circumstance and ceremony, and amid the acclamations of a thoughtless mob, who encouraged them with shouts of "Death to the Friar!" One of those commissioners was Fra Giovacchino Turriano, General of the Dominican Order, highly esteemed for his learning and worth, and a former friend of Savonarola. The other was the Spanish doctor, Francesco Romolino, an official at the Roman court, and eventually a cardinal, a man of scandalous life, and characterised by all the mercilessness of an inquisitor, whose very presence

in connection with such an affair was itself an omen of evil, and a sure guarantee against any failure of vigour through the gentleness which his colleague might show. In fact, Romolino made no attempt to conceal that he had come to condemn Savonarola, not to judge him; and on the very night of his arrival in the city he is reported to have said in boastful levity, "We shall have a fine bonfire, for I have the sentence of condemnation safe in my pocket."

Next day the trial began, the Papal commissioners being assisted by five representatives of the different bodies of Florentine officials. Ser Ceccone, despite the clumsiness of his former services, was once more called in to exercise his manipulating gifts, with two other scribes, however, to aid him in his nefarious task. This third trial, even more than the others that preceded it, was little else than a pretence. The result was a foregone conclusion. Savonarola was from the first treated as a guilty man, and the sole aim of his judges was to compel him to confess himself guilty. With regard to his endeavours to obtain the calling of a General Council, which was the head and front of his offending, he was long and severely questioned. Every means was used to extract from him information as to his confederates in that scheme, which was held to be so fatally perilous to the unity of the Church; but he persistently declared that he had spoken to none regarding it except the three brothers, Domenico, Silvestro, and Niccolo; that he had not taken counsel with any of the princes of Italy nor any of the prelates or cardinals on the subject; and that his hopes were placed on the King of France, the Em-

peror, the King of Spain, and the King of England. He was asked whether he had drawn from Fra Domenico or Fra Silvestro the secrets revealed to them in the confessional, and to this he stoutly and repeatedly answered that he had never done any such thing. Then Romolino, who appears to have assumed the leading part in the examination, ordered him to be stripped for the rope, and told him to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The prospect of the terrible agony sent a spasm of terror through his shattered, sensitive frame. He flung himself on his knees, and exclaimed, "Magistrates of Florence, bear me witness that I have denied my light from fear of torture; if I must suffer I will suffer for the truth; that which I have said I have had from God. O God, grant that I may repent of having denied Thee for fear of torture. I deserve it." Then he was stripped. In vain he showed his left arm, all wrenched and powerless—there was neither ruth nor pity to be looked for now. When drawn up by the pulley, he became delirious. "O Jesus, help me; this time Thou hast caught me," he cried; and on being asked, as he hung, why he said this, he replied, "That I might be thought a good man. Tear me no more. I will tell the truth, for sure, for sure." After being let down, he made the pathetic acknowledgment, "When I see the instruments of torture I lose myself; when I am in a room with a few men who deal peaceably with me I can express myself better."

The next day there was another examination, and the torture was renewed, the main object being to wring out of him more particulars as to the affair

of the General Council, and specially to discover whether his old friend Cardinal Caraffa of Naples had been implicated in the design. At one point, amid the frenzy of his sufferings, he seemed to confess the Cardinal's cognisance of the affair. "Naples! Naples!" he exclaimed, "I consulted also with him;" but when relieved from the racking torment, again he protested explicitly that the responsibility rested entirely on himself, and that neither the Cardinal nor any other was concerned in the scheme.

Seeing at last that nothing further of real importance could be extracted either by threats or tortures, Romolino dismissed him with the command to appear on the morrow to receive his sentence. "I am a prisoner," Savonarola replied, "I will come if my jailer bring me."

On the 22nd of May the fate of Savonarola and his companions was decided. The question had been discussed in a meeting of officials, where one man, Agnolo Niccolini, was found honest enough to bear testimony to the Friar's learning, worth of character, and high moral influence, and generous enough to plead for the preservation of his life at least, that, though imprisoned, he might benefit the world by his writings. But this witness had no support from his colleagues. Savonarola alive, they retorted, would be a danger to the public peace. "A dead enemy makes no more war." The judges and commissioners had their consultation also, and they resolved on passing a sentence of death. That such a sentence had been deliberately contemplated from the outset is only too clear from the whole course of procedure; and the main object of the three successive trials

had been to obtain a sufficiently ostensible warrant for pronouncing it. That warrant, it was held, had been found in Savonarola's crime in risking a disastrous schism in the Church and consequent disorder in society by his General Council scheme; in his disobedience to the authority of the Pope by setting at nought the decree of excommunication; and in the political and civil discords which his interference in public affairs was alleged to have caused. In the excited condition of feeling at the time, and with a party in power implacably bent on getting a dreaded obstacle to their influence out of the way, those grounds sufficed as a colourable pretext for the Friar's condemnation. No allowance was made for the strong reasons which had moved Savonarola to act as he did—the wholesale bribery and notoriously immoral life of Alexander VI., by persisting in which he forfeited his right to dictate in the sphere of morals and religion. The Pope's jurisdiction, it was maintained, was not for a moment to be questioned, however unworthy his personal character might be; and for such an attitude of opposition as Savonarola had presumed to take, death was the punishment inevitably due. The Signory in office endorsed the decision, as being in harmony with their views.

The two other friars were included in the same condemnation. Romolino, indeed, suggested that the life of Fra Domenico should be spared, as he was somewhat doubtful as to the prudence of executing a man who was still in great favour with a large section of the citizens. Fra Domenico, he was immediately told, would keep alive the doctrines of Fra Girolamo. "Ah, well," he responded, "a wretched friar more

or less makes little difference; put him to death, then."

The sentence was at once published in the city, and duly announced to the three condemned men that evening. Fra Silvestro was completely overwhelmed by the intelligence. He had neither the courage of the martyr nor the resignation of the saint. Fra Domenico, with his warm, loyal heart, was filled with joy at the thought of sharing the same fate as his master, and on being told, in answer to his inquiry as to the manner of death to be adopted, that he and the others were to be hanged first and then burnt, he pleaded that he might be burnt alive, and thereby give fuller proof of his devotion. Savonarola was on his knees in prayer when the messenger entered. He received the news of his sentence with calm resignation. The worst bitterness had passed; he had gone through his Gethsemane in some of the solitary hours he had first spent in that narrow prison-cell, when the sting of rejection and of apparently baffled endeavour pierced his soul, and he had faced in thought the awful crisis which he saw approaching; and so, having already drunk the keenest drop in the cup of his agony, when informed that he must be prepared to die on the following morning, he offered no remark, but quietly resumed his broken prayer.

Soon he was joined in his lonely vigil by a good man, Jacopo Niccolini, a member of the Battuti brotherhood, whose self-imposed task it was to attend and comfort the doomed in their last hours. With face veiled, and robed in black from head to foot, he came to minister consolation to a brother-man in his adversity. "I do not come," he said, "to urge resignation on one who has

converted a whole people to virtue." "Do your duty," was Savonarola's simple reply. He had only one request to make, and that was, that his kindly visitor should procure for him the favour of a brief interview with his two brethren before death. Niccolini set out on his errand, and after some difficulty gained the Signory's consent. It was arranged that the interview should take place in the hall of the Greater Council,—the magnificent chamber which had been erected as an addition to the Palazzo Vecchio through the patriotic efforts of Savonarola in the great days of his popularity and power; and under its spacious roof, amid the gloom of falling night, the three friars met again after six weeks of separation, during which they had undergone an experience of weary imprisonment and excruciating torture that had twisted their limbs, sapped their strength, and rent their hearts with sorrow. Both Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro had been made aware of the master's supposed confession, but once more in his presence, and looking on his worn but serene face, they felt the old spell of his commanding soul, and all doubt vanished from their minds. Gently he reproved Fra Domenico for his desire to be burnt alive. "It is not given to any one," he said, "to choose the manner of his own death, but it is our duty only to take with joy the death which God may provide for us. Who knows if thou couldst undergo the death thou desirest, which depends not upon our strength, but the grace of God? man should never tempt God." To Fra Silvestro he turned with a few words of grave yet kindly warning. He knew that this brother intended to speak to the people and declare his innocence from the scaffold, and he enjoined him to abandon the idea. "Thou

shouldst keep thy peace like Christ, who, though innocent, yet would not declare His innocence even on the Cross." In reverent silence the two men listened to the admonitions thus addressed to them, and then, humbly kneeling at Savonarola's feet, they received his benediction, and were led away to their separate cells. In his own cell in the tower Savonarola had the company of the friendly Niccolini all through the hours of that last night on earth. Having declined the offer of food, lest the clearness of his mind should be disturbed, he was soon overcome by exhaustion, and was fain to ask Niccolini to allow him to rest his head on his knee. Thus pillowed, lying down on the floor, he fell asleep, and in his sleep his countenance became serene and smiling like a child's, and he seemed to his wondering companion as already enjoying a glimpse of the eternal blessedness. Awaking at last, he was full of thankfulness to his gentle and patient comforter, and opened his mind to him regarding the troubles which he believed to be in store for Florence, troubles which, according to the rather doubtful statement of Burlamacchi, he predicted would come to pass when there should be a Pope called Clement ruling at Rome.

When morning broke, Savonarola and the two condemned brothers were permitted to meet once more in the sombre little chapel, with its few contracted windows and simple furnishings, on the third floor of the Palazzo. There, while the crowd was already beginning to gather in the broad Piazza outside, and the preparations for the execution were going on, those three men celebrated their last Sacrament together, and in the most sacred rites of religion nerved their

souls for the fate which was now immediately at hand. The finest qualities of Savonarola's spirit shone forth in that solemn hour. Raising the consecrated Host, he broke out into fervent prayer, making confession of the genuine faith of his heart. "Lord, I know that Thou art that very God, the Creator of the world and of human nature. I know that Thou art that perfect, indivisible, and inseparable Trinity, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I know that Thou art that Eternal Word, who didst descend from heaven to earth in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Thou didst ascend the wood of the Cross to shed Thy precious Blood for us, miserable sinners. I pray Thee, my Lord; I pray Thee, my Salvation; I pray Thee, my Consoler; that such precious Blood be not shed for me in vain, but may be for the remission of all my sins. For these I crave Thy pardon, from the day that I received the water of Holy Baptism even to this moment; and I confess to Thee, Lord, my guilt. And so I crave pardon of Thee for what offences I have done to this city and all this people, in things spiritual and temporal, as well as for all those things wherein of myself I am not conscious of having erred. And humbly do I crave pardon of all those persons who are here standing round. May they pray to God for me, and may He make me strong up to the last end, so that the enemy may have no power over me. Amen." Then he and his companions took the Holy Communion; and they were still devoutly kneeling in silent meditation when the guards came to lead them out to their doom. As they descended the stairs to the scene of execution, Savonarola spoke a few words of encouragement to Fra Silvestro: "We shall soon be there where we

can sing with David, 'Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'"

A mighty concourse was waiting in the Piazza della Signoria, trembling with eagerness, yet for the most part awed and subdued. The citizens of Florence could not quite forget what the chief victim, whose death they had come to witness, had been. Many of them had chafed under his rigid moral restrictions; many were opposed to him politically; many were determined to break his power; but there were thousands whose hearts had been cheered and strengthened by his teaching, who had found an inspiration for their lives in his holy zeal, and who, though staggered and perplexed by his failure to substantiate his prophetic mission in the way they expected, were conscious of a mysterious sense of his greatness still haunting their thoughts. Many besides were there whose loyalty and faith had never faltered, and who cherished a secret hope that some sign might yet be given to attest their revered leader as the messenger of God.

Again, as in the arrangements for the ordeal by fire, a long narrow platform stretched out from the corner of the Palazzo Vecchio for some distance across the square. In this case, however, the platform ended in a circular area on which a pile of fuel was heaped, and above this rose the gibbet, with its three halters and three chains—the latter to hold the bodies suspended after the fuel had been fired. The gibbet, an upright beam with projecting arms, looked so like a cross, that the adherents of Savonarola were heard loudly murmuring, "They are going to crucify him like his Master;" and one arm had to be cut short to destroy the comparison.

Three tribunals had been erected on the Palace balcony, between the doorway and the platform—one for the presiding bishop, another for the Papal commissioners, and a third for the Gonfaloniere and the Eight, whose function it was to give the final order for death.

When the three condemned friars, on coming down from the chapel, reached the Palace steps, they were met by a Dominican of Santa Maria Novella, who commanded them to be stripped of their monastic robes; and so they emerged into view wearing only their woollen tunics, with feet bare and hands bound behind. They were then taken before the first tribunal, where the Bishop of Vasona, an old disciple of Savonarola, sat in charge, painfully ill at ease in fulfilling the duty laid upon him. There they were again clad in their religious vestments, and again stripped in token of their formal degradation. While this ceremony was being performed, the Bishop took Savonarola by the arm, and in the confusion of the moment stammered out, "I separate thee from the Church militant—and triumphant." "Militant," rejoined Savonarola in correction; "not triumphant; that is not in your power." "Amen," said the Bishop, "may God lead you there." Then, in their bare woollen tunics once more, they passed to the next tribunal, where the Pope's commissioners read out their sentence, which condemned them as "heretics, schismatics, and despisers of the Holy See," and ordered them to be delivered over to the secular arm. When the reading was finished, Romolino added, "His Holiness is pleased to free you from the pains of purgatory by granting you a plenary indulgence. Do you accept it?" They bowed their heads

in sign of assent. At the third tribunal, where the civil authorities sat, they heard their sentence confirmed, and the death-penalty formally decreed—that they should be hanged and then burnt, "so that their souls should be entirely separated from their bodies."

Thus, disrobed, degraded, doomed to death, they moved onwards to the scaffold, at first in silent prayer, and then reciting the *Te Deum* in an undertone together. As they passed along the roughly-constructed platform, their naked feet were pierced by sharp stakes thrust through the gaps between the planks by loose youths among the crowd. All round, in the space nearest to the platform, a wild rabble had collected, drawn from the worst elements of the population, and their spiteful insults, curses, and jeers formed a rude contrast to the subdued demeanour of the multitude that filled the square. Amid all the mockery and violence, however, expressions of sympathy were not wanting. Some one held out food and pressed it on Savonarola to strengthen him, but he merely replied, "Why do you offer me these things, since I am now to depart this life?" Another tried to comfort him by referring to the good works he had done. "God only," he said, "can console men in their last hour." A friendly priest near by asked him, "With what spirit do you bear this martyrdom?" "My Saviour," was his answer, "willingly died for me, and should not I willingly give up this poor body out of love to Him?"

At the foot of the scaffold they all kneeled, each one before his crucifix. Fra Silvestro was the first called on to suffer. He mounted the steps firmly, for strength had come to him at last, and with the words, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," he gave his neck

to the halter. Fra Domenico followed, and with beaming face went to his death as to a festival. Last of all came Savonarola, who had remained kneeling in profound thought while the execution of his companions was going on. Calm, resolute, with faith strong in God and in the work which God had given him to do, he mounted the scaffold, and for a moment cast his eyes round, and looked the multitude in the face. Often had he appealed to those people and stirred their hearts by his eloquence and power; but all thought of appealing to them was abandoned now. Sorrowing for Florence, he was utterly resigned as to his own fate. In that last glance he saw the vast throng awed into silence, the flash of thousands of eyes intent on witnessing his death, and, immediately beneath, the glare of torches burning, ready to fire the fuel in which his body would be consumed. Yet there was no word of remonstrance; he stood there to meet his end at peace with himself, and in perfect charity with all men. Amid the hush of suspense which fell as the halter was thrown over his neck and he was swung into the air, one harsh voice broke in with the derisive shout, "Now, prophet, is the time to work a miracle." And, indeed, the expectation of a supernatural wonder was still present in many minds.

As soon as life was extinct the pile of faggots was lighted, but a gust of wind blew the flames aside, and for some little while it seemed as if the vaguely looked-for prodigy had appeared. "A miracle, a miracle!" was the cry of many in their excitement, as they drew back startled at the sight. The wind ceased, and the flames leaped up and enveloped the suspended bodies The cords which bound Savonarola's arms were soon

consumed, and the scorching heat caused his right hand to make a convulsive movement which arrested attention. He was raising it, said his faithful followers, in the act of blessing the people who had cruelly hastened his end.

Thus, at ten o'clock in the morning of 23rd May 1498, died the great preacher of Florence, who had held a commanding place in the mind of his generation as a saint of exceptional purity, a devoted moral and religious reformer, a powerful political leader, a daring and independent thinker, a prophetic messenger of the Almighty. He was just in the middle period of his manhood—forty-five years of age. High as his aims were, and disinterested as were his motives, he had attempted a task which drew upon him opposition from many quarters and in many forms, and he fell a victim to the hostility he had raised. His ashes were flung into the Arno. Vile calumnies were heaped on his name; his foes congratulated one another on his destruction. Yet the men and women who believed in him still—and they were much more numerous than on the surface appeared—cherished his memory and clung to his teaching with pious reverence. They gathered every relic of him they could possibly find; they came often to pray at the spot where he perished; they deposited flowers there every year on the anniversary of his death; and the practice was taken up by devout souls in succeeding generations, and continued unbroken for two centuries or more. His books were eagerly read; the details of his life were industriously collected; and ardent disciples found a pious joy in giving a record of his career and work to the world.

# CHAPTER XXV

## Review

As in the case of many a distinguished man called to perform a difficult work in difficult times, and failing to carry the objects he aimed at to full visible success, the reputation of Savonarola has suffered from the shadow cast upon it by his failure. His real greatness has been obscured, not so much by the melancholy tragedy of his death, as by the troubles and animosities which beset him in his later days, and which to a lamentable degree cramped his usefulness and power. Those fatal embarrassments were due to several causes, which, though already touched upon in the course of the narrative, may appropriately be summed up here.

1. He accepted a position which was too complicated to maintain. In the attempt he made to combine the rôle of political director with that of religious teacher and reformer, he undertook a task which, by very necessity, involved him in meshes of perplexing entanglement. The exigencies of the times were such that in his political action he was forced to identify himself with a particular party in the State, and, as a consequence, the interests of his religious work were mixed up with that party's rising or falling fortunes. It was not in the nature of things that he should

continue for long to control the government of the State from the pulpit without incurring for his doctrines, his reforming efforts, and his own person, the full brunt of partisan enmity and intrigue. The service he rendered to Florence in framing its constitution after the expulsion of the Medici, was invaluable. It was a service thrust upon him by a pressure of circumstances which it was impossible for him to withstand; he was the only man of any influence in Florence who had a well-defined, enlightened, practicable form of government to propose, and his success in securing its adoption was flattering in the highest degree. Unfortunately, however, having once been drawn so prominently into the sphere of politics, he could not restrain himself from endeavouring more or less to regulate the actual working of the political machinery he had organised. This was one of the rocks on which the lofty usefulness of his career was split. A factious opposition was aroused, which, increasing always in bitterness and vehemence, broke down his sway as a religious teacher, and contributed to his destruction when the fitting opportunity arrived. Moreover, the difficulties thus occasioned were aggravated by the collision into which his political action brought him with the Pope, whose implacable resentment he incurred by standing between him and his favourite policy of drawing Florence into the Holy League.

2. He imposed a restraint which inevitably provoked revolt. Well-meant and laudable as most of his regulations for the reform of manners were, Savonarola committed the mistake of enforcing their observance by measures of undue severity. Prince Schwartzenberg was right when he said, "You can do anything with

bayonets except sit on them." That was a terse, picturesque statement of the truth that the enforcement of rigid rules by means correspondingly rigid is a perilous experiment. On that experiment Savonarola ventured, and the hostility which latterly crippled his work and compassed his downfall was largely owing to the rebellious feeling stirred up thereby.

3. He assumed a prerogative which it was hazardous to exercise. By the claim to direct supernatural illumination which he asserted so persistently, though with sincere enough intent, Savonarola fostered a strong delusion in the popular mind; and when that delusion was shattered by the disappointment in connection with the ordeal by fire, he lost a powerful body of support, and was left helplessly exposed to the political and ecclesiastical enmities that were conspiring to ruin him.

In brief, Savonarola's action in politics drew upon him the rancour of opposing factions in the Republic and of the Pope at Rome. The ascetic rigour of his reforms kindled resentments, deep and fierce. His honest but mistaken zeal in insisting on his prophetic and supernatural gifts excited expectations which he could not possibly fulfil, and which, when baffled, created an irritation fatally damaging to his influence and prestige.

Such were the circumstances which have cast a shadow over the real greatness of Savonarola. Nevertheless, the greatness was there, and had been unmistakably proved—the splendid intellectual capacity, the firm grasp of knowledge, penetrating insight, wide sweep of thought, lofty devotion of soul, bold and powerful personality. And the force of his exalted

endowments was heightened by the passionate earnestness of his nature, his unfaltering faith in the eternal majesty of righteousness, the high moral aims by which he was fired. Though foiled, by the confusions of a corrupt transitional age, in accomplishing all the ends for which he strove, and though struck down by the very opposition which his high-purposed efforts had awakened, such a man was bound to exert an influence of no ordinary character on the mind and life of the world. The moral enthusiasm he infused into the nobler spirits of his time lived on after him. He turned men's thoughts to the great living problems of existence; and in numberless cases where his opinions were disowned and his peculiar work slighted, the mental incentive received from his preaching and writings impelled men to pursue the track of inquiry in the new direction to which his venturesome genius had pointed. To a great extent he rescued the New Learning in Florence and throughout Italy from the barren and frivolous uses to which it was being applied, and he did it by the conception, which was always prominent in his teaching, of the vital relation which all learning has to the larger and more stirring interests of life. Thus the work which the Humanists of the Renaissance were doing in quickening the free activity of the spirit of man, Savonarola lifted to a region calculated to afford results more directly beneficial to the progress and elevation of humanity. Again, the testimony which by word and example he bore for the freedom of the human soul against political despotism on the one hand, and unbending ecclesiastical officialism on the other, had effects which lasted far beyond the term of his own brief career. Though himself finally

crushed, a martyr to the work which he felt laid upon him by the will of the Almighty, he broke open a path by which others could advance and the world move forward to a better day. Society was waking up, but was restless, uncertain, easily misled; he gave voice to the vague aspirations of his time, fed and strengthened all that was best in them, put them into definite form, and revealed the lines along which the struggle should be made if their realisation was ever to be reached.

A particularly important factor in Savonarola's influence as an epoch-maker was the fresh, arresting light he threw on the essential value for the good of the world of practical Christian morality. This, in fact, was his supreme idea, which he held up and flashed on men's minds in every sermon, book, or pamphlet, whether he dealt with religious, political, or social themes. It was in the interests of Christian morality that he prized his position as the chief preacher in Florence, and that he was induced to enter the arena of political affairs. And his enthusiasm for this object it was which inspired his dream of converting Florence into a theocracy. Many of his reforming measures, as has been seen, collapsed. In the impetuousness of his zeal he fell into mistakes as to the methods and means by which the end he sought could be attained. But the great idea itself — the idea of practical righteousness, justice, purity, and good-doing, as the fundamental conditions of well-being in the Church and the State, in social and private life—was so strikingly presented and pressed, that it laid hold of men's inmost convictions, and gave to the moral sense of that generation a stimulus which was passed on, to stir to higher moral life the generations following.

Perhaps, after all, Savonarola's most distinctive contribution to the progress of the world was the moral passion he inspired—the feeling he awakened in a sordid, pagan age of the great ends of life, of the needs and claims of man's immortal nature, of the glory of truth and the noble endeavour for right. That passion was in himself; it throbbed through the sermons he preached, and through the writings he left behind him. And it freshened men's thinking; it quickened the pulse of their whole mental being; it forced on them a new standard of judgment; it fired them with visions of higher stages of good for humanity, and nerved them to strain forward to the untold possibilities of the future.

Thus Savonarola stood at the dawn of a new era, and roused men's minds to move on and grasp its larger interests, and share its freer and more vivid activities. So far, no doubt, he was still clogged by the trammels of mediæval tradition, mediæval asceticisms and superstitions, mediæval scholasticism and pedantry, mediæval conceptions of the supernatural. Yet he was alive and awake with a new spirit of enterprise, panting to strike out on bolder, freer lines of thought, and to find fresh paths of effort for the highest human energies. He was like one of those figures to be seen in old pictures of the Resurrection at the Last Judgment—half-risen and erect, with eyes eagerly turned, and arms uplifted, towards the new light of life, but with feet still bound and clasped in the encumbering earth, and not yet perfectly free. Hampered though he was by the crude ideas and habits amid which he had grown up, Savonarola in certain outstanding points was in advance of his age.

In his determined testimony on behalf of the independence of the human conscience, in his assertion of every man's right to question all authority not based on justice and rectitude, and in his insistence on the Christian moral Ideal as the supreme rule in all departments of private and public life, he took up a position which was novel and unfamiliar to the men of that day. And he had to suffer the penalties of originality, penalties that came upon him with quicker stroke and heavier force by reason of his very courage and sincerity. Had he been less daring or less honest, more inclined to trim and temporise, he might have escaped many of the troubles which combined so tragically to end his career. Had he been less impatient to see his ideas and the new order he looked for established in actual fact, he might have avoided the most fatal of the mistakes into which he was betrayed. But the moral strenuousness of his temper could not be repressed; it urged him on, regardless of all prudential cautions. And when the storm burst on him and wrought his death, it was his own intrepid, uncompromising loyalty to the high purpose of his life, and to what he believed to be the cause of human progress, that brought it down in such overwhelming fury. For, in George Eliot's words, "power rose against him not because of his sins, but because of his greatness—not because he sought to deceive the world, but because he sought to make it noble."

It would be vain to conceal or minimise his limitations and his errors; and there is no need to make the attempt in order to establish his claim to generous recognition. The place he filled in the life of his

generation, the breath of fresh vitality he introduced into human thought, and the invigorating impetus he gave to the best human aspirations; his progressive spirit, and the higher conceptions of well-being to which he struggled unswervingly to lead society forward—all these features of his life and work, combined with the masterful force and devoted fervour of his own mind, entitle Fra Girolamo Savonarola to be ranked among the world's great epoch-making men.

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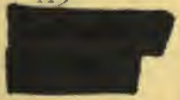
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